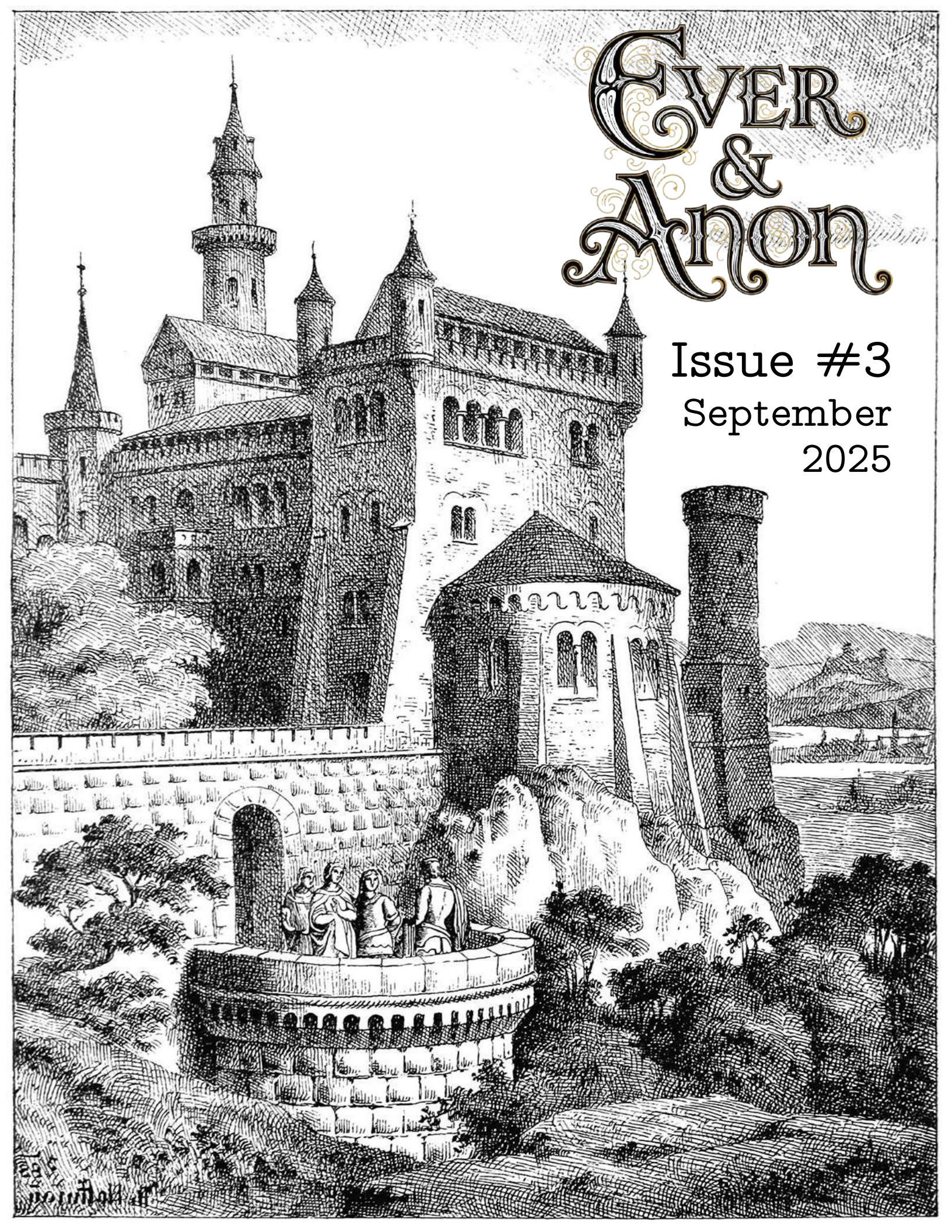


Ever & Anon

Issue #3

September 2025

Ever & Anon is a digital monthly APA about roleplaying games and is published under the Creative Commons (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0) license. See https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/deed.en for details.

The opinions expressed within each zine are solely those of the individual contributors and do not reflect the opinions of the APA or its management. All material in this issue, unless expressly noted otherwise, is contributed by its respective authors for use only in this publication in its various print and electronic forms, including public archival into perpetuity. All other rights are retained by each author/contributor, and therefore other use of any portion of this publication requires the permission of the original copyright holder(s).

If you'd like to be informed when new issues become available for download, please join our Mailing List at https://groups.google.com/g/everanon, our Discord Server at https://discord.gg/KM3EwADZ3x, or you can check our website at https://everanon.org.

Contributor Guidelines:

Contributors are expected to stay on topic and remain civil to each other. Ever & Anon will be available to the public for free, so matters you don't want publicly known should be discussed elsewhere. Please adhere to all the normal rules of public discourse: no libel, no inciting violence, no infringement of another's copyright or trademark, and no pornography. Zines should use page dimensions of 8.5" x 11" (portrait). Maximum zine length is 16 pages. Maximum length for fiction (other than campaign reports) is 6 pages. Discussion of contemporary politics is discouraged but permitted with a maximum length for political content set at 2 pages. AI-generated artwork is allowed, but AI-generated text is not. If you want to use an AI to help you edit your zine, you may do so. All artwork must be attributed to its creator, whether human or AI, unless it is in the public domain. When you submit your zine to Ever & Anon, you are granting the APA a perpetual, non-exclusive right to publish your zine in a single issue of the APA, meaning that you retain the copyright to your work, and so you can publish it elsewhere, but you cannot force Ever & Anon to unpublish your zine once it has been published.

Contributors may submit their PDF zines via email to apa@everanon.org.

Submission deadlines and Ignorable Themes for the next several issues are as follows:

Issue #4 – September 21st: What are your favorite RPGs to play, run, or just read?

Issue #5 – October 21st: What media (novels, film, anime, etc.) have inspired you vis-à-vis RPGs?

Issue #6 – November 21st: Game conventions: the good, the bad, and the weird.

Issue #7 – December 21st: The dumbest/silliest/craziest things the players ever did.

Issue #8 – January 21st: GMing tricks you've either "borrowed" from other GMs or figured out yourself.

Ever & Anon emerged with the closing of Alarums & Excursions, an Amateur Press Association run by Lee Gold for nearly fifty years. This community of APAers would not exist if not for her steadfast efforts.

Ever & Anon

Issue #3 (ver. 1) – September 2025

Table of Contents

Front Cover: “Siegfried Welcomed” – Th. Hoffmann	1
Front Page	2
Table of Contents	3
What is This?	4
Solicitations & Abbreviations	5
Firedrake’s Hoard – Roger Bell_West	6
Children’s Interactive Fiction, Pt 4 – Pedro Panhoca da Silva & Camila Lourenço Panhoca	10
Reddened Stars #1 – John Redden	11
Overlord’s Annals (v4n7) – Attronarch	15
Bugbears & Ballyhoo #42 – Gabriel Roark	23
The Phoenix Nest #3 – Michael Cule	35
Four Things – Clark Timmins	44
A Rhodomontadulous Promenade #3 – George Phillies	54
Attacks of Opportunity #2 – Dylan Capel	59
Going to be Ad-Libbed #1 – Avram Grumer	61
De Ludis Elficis Fictis – Pum	65
Twisting the Rope #3 – Myles Corcoran	66
Dreadsword #2 – Mitch Hyde	75
Quasipseudoludognostication #3 – Patrick Riley	82
Denizens of the Library #2 – Brian Rogers	94
The Dragon’s Beard #88 – Patrick Zoch	100
Engines & Emulators #3 – Heath Row	105
The Seedling #50 – Mark Nemeth	108
Age of Menace #240 – Brian Christopher Misiaszek	111
Ronin Engineer – Jim Eckman	127
An Unlooked For Zine #2 – Lisa Padol	129
Accidental Recall #2 – Joshua Kronengold	145
Bumbling Through Dungeons #3 – Mark A. Wilson	148
Traveller PBEM: Plankwell, Ch 48 – Vassilakos, Collinson, and Rader	152

This issue’s IgTheme is: *What is your playing style or what do you look for in an RPG session?*

The cover art for this issue was downloaded from https://www.oldbookillustrations.com/. The picture on page 5 was generated and converted into a sketch by Canva. The picture on page 152 was generated by DeviantArt’s DreamUp & converted using insMind’s Photo-to-Sketch.

What is This?

A Newbie's Guide to APAs

Q: What is this?
A: An APA.
Q: What's an APA?
A: An Amateur Press Association.
Q: What's that?
A: A collection of zines. It can also refer to the community of people writing the zines.
Q: What's a zine?
A: A fanzine. A small, amateur magazine usually distributed for free or at cost.
Q: So this is a collection of free fanzines written by amateurs?
A: Exactly.
Q: And each one has a separate author?
A: Right.
Q: But I see the same names appearing again and again throughout.
A: Those are comments. We comment on each others zines. When you see *Brian Misiaszek: blah-blah-blah…*, if there are no quotes around the *blah-blah-blah*, that's probably a comment to Brian.
Q: And everyone is doing all this for free?
A: Yes. It's like a cocktail party, but all written out. Come join us, if you like.

Amateur Press Associations date back to the late 1800s and started to become popular among fantasy and science fiction enthusiasts during the 1930s.[1] Alarums & Excursions was the first APA formed specifically to cover roleplaying games.[2]

"Each contributor would send in their zine, and then Lee would edit, collate, and distribute. Contributors would often address each other in their contributions, thus creating a community. At the time when there were no blogs nor forums, this was huge."[3]

Q: But now there are blogs and various online forums, so why do APAs still exist?
A: Because one type of forum isn't necessarily any better or worse than the others. One advantage of the APA model is longevity. Because they have multiple contributors and don't rely on making money, APAs are more durable than individual blogs or traditional magazines. Also, because websites come and go, whatever is posted online will probably eventually vanish into the electronic ether. But whatever is put into a publication that can be downloaded and archived is more likely to survive due to the sheer fact that multiple copies will exist. And the back issues become an indelible record of what people used to think. They provide insight into a world that used to be.

Referring to Alarums & Excursions, Mark Rein-Hagen writes, *"Each issue was a revelation—raw theory, wild invention, fierce debates on the soul of gaming—all stitched together by the indomitable Lee Gold, whose work made that scattered fellowship feel like a living conversation."*[4]

Q: Who is Lee Gold?
A: She founded Alarums & Excursions, creating a forum, perhaps the first forum, specifically for the discussion of roleplaying games. Then she continued to run A&E for nearly fifty years. It's an extraordinary legacy, and she's the reason this community of APAers exists.

---

1 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amateur_press_association
2 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alarums_and_Excursions
3 https://attronarch.com/goodbye-to-alarums-and-excursions-apa
4 https://www.facebook.com/Reinhagen/posts/pfbid0nXr6bkZU8V28t2xMHvq5CKgpTGfLX35yU3VBAjuwTgQps8gX9CZDcbHZFc5VpYn6l

I Want YOU!

to join our flippant fellowship

Send us a zine. Or comments. Or a blurb.
Or just fart in our general direction.

Send your thoughts to apa@everanon.org, and provided they aren't laced with orcish profanity (or even if they are), we'll likely publish them for the enlightenment & edification of the entire APA. Please include your name, class, and level of experience, and be sure to save vs. spell to avoid being drawn in. Halflings and gnomes incur a -1 penalty. (Sorry, shorties.)

Abbreviations & Acronyms You Need to Know:

A&E: Alarums & Excursions
APA: Amateur Press Association
BBG: Big Bad Guy/Gal (a major villain)
BTW: By the way
d6: a six-sided die
2d6: two six-sided dice
d4: a caltrop (very dangerous)
E&A: Ever & Anon
Frex: For example
FTF: Face-to-face (aka TTRPG)
FWIW: For what it's worth
IgTheme: Ignorable theme
IIRC: If I recall correctly
IM(H)O: In my (humble) opinion
LARP: Live Action Role Playing
Nextish: Next issue
(N)PC: (Non-)Player Character
PBEM: Play-by-Email
RAE(BNC): Read and enjoyed (but no comment)
Re: Regarding
RHCT(M): Regarding his/her comment to (me)
RPG: Role-playing game
RYCT(M): Regarding your comment to (me)
RYQT(M): Regarding your question to (me)
TTRPG: Tabletop role-playing game (aka FTF)
WRT: With respect to / With regard to
YMMV: Your mileage may vary
Zine: A writer's contribution

Firedrake's Hoard

Number 1: by Roger BW

- Blog: https://blog.firedrake.org/
- Gaming stuff: https://tekeli.li/
- RPG podcast: https://tekeli.li/podcast/
- Actual Play: https://tekeli.li/whartson-hall/
- Mastodon: https://discordian.social/@RogerBW
- This subdocument contains no content produced by generative AI tools.

Who are you?

Roger BW. I've been role-playing since 1981, starting with Moldvay Basic D&D. I've written a little for ***GURPS*** and some other systems. I tend to GM more than I play. I live in the UK, not far from Michael Cule[1].

What do you do?

I play and run games with Whartson Hall (https://tekeli.li/whartson-hall/). We record and publish most of our sessions; we're not trying to be the next *Critical Role*, but we are a bunch of friends who enjoy our games and who want to share them with anyone who's interested. Be warned! No rehearsals, no professional actors[2], no "script coordinators" to make sure everything comes out as planned, just a game session that happens to be recorded, the way Paul McLean did it when he uploaded that first game recording to the Internet in 2003.

Once a month I co-present the podcast Improvised Radio Theatre with Dice (https://tekeli.li/podcast/) with Michael Cule of this parish; as I write we have just recorded the 150th episode.

Roughly twice a year I co-edit a new issue of The Path of Cunning (https://tekeli.li/path-of-cunning/) with John Dallman. We think this is the world's only ***GURPS*** fanzine. If you have something that might fit there, give me a shout; the next deadline is 2025-11-01.

I play a lot of ***GURPS***, and a fair bit of *Cthulhu Eternal*, and *FUDGE*, but I'm fairly system-agnostic these days as long as it'll support the way I like to play. See below.

I have a bunch of writing projects "in progress". Honest.

I also write software. I am, as they say, a very technical boy.

Yeah, but what have you done lately?

At the moment I'm running the Mongoose 2300AD reworking of the classic *Bayern* campaign, for two separate groups (one weekly, one monthly). I like this campaign a great deal: in a game and setting known mostly for its military SF bias[3] this is a campaign with relatively little combat, and lots of problem-solving, or perhaps one might say situation-solving: here is what's going on, will you learn more, what will you do about it, or indeed will you just go away and leave it? It has shades of *Star Trek*, but there's no Federation to back up

[1] With Pum nearby as well, at this rate we shall be a Cabal.

[2] except on the very rare occasions when Michael joins us

[3] and it does that jolly well, but it's not my current desire

the mission, just what the explorers brought with them.

I'm playing in a ***GURPS*** campaign set in an alternative 1950s; it's a little pulpy, and very Cold War, with holdout Nazis and psi abilities being recurrent themes so far. Oh, and aliens.

By this time this comes out I will be acting as Lead Playtester for the ***GURPS Ring of Fire*** manuscript, the official gaming companion to the world of Eric Flint's *1632* series..

About Typst

I've produced this PDF and other recent material using Typst (https://typst.app/). Although its web site offers a WYSIWYG editor, at heart it's a markup language, in the same sort of style as TeX or troff: I write text and commands, and the software renders those into a PDF.

Since I exclusively use free software my layout options other than word processors are limited. Scribus (https://scribus.net/) has its points, but takes a basically graphical approach, and makes it very difficult to produce a consistent layout from page to page. Until recently I was using LibreOffice, but once one tries to lay out a 60-page document with pictures every page or two, the layout starts to become distinctly unstable, with images sometimes jumping from place to place when one edits something later in the document.

Thus my joy at finding Typst, which perfectly suits the way I like to work: write text in Emacs, periodically compile it and inspect the PDF to see if it looks right. Once a piece of layout is done, it stays done, and I can put in a function and reproduce it later elsewhere in the document. It's the difference between "the grid lines in this table are this thick" and "the standard style of table for this document has grid lines like this, override if you need to". And of course it can do all the standard things, like setting onto a page size that is the overlap of A4 and US Letter, 210mm × 11″, so that it can be printed on either without cropping or distortion.

Perhaps of more relevance to gaming, though, is that this system has a fully-fledged programming language embedded in it. Every layout system grows one eventually, but this has it built in from the start, which makes it much easier to use; its syntax owes quite a bit to Rust and Python, with a broadly functional approach. I've now written character sheet managers for *Cthulhu Eternal* and for Mongoose's version of *2300AD*; these take character definition files written in JSON or some other structured data format, and produce playable character sheets, including calculations

Player	RogerBW	*Statistic*	*Score*	*×5*	*Distinguishing Feature*
Character	Frank Farah	**Strength (STR)**	17	85	Huge; damage bonus +2
Era	Cold War	**Constitution (CON)**	10	50	
Archetype	Historian	**Dexterity (DEX)**	11	55	
Age	35	**Intelligence (INT)**	16	80	Perceptive
Pronouns	he/him	**Power (POW)**	11	55	
Birthplace	London	**Charisma (CHA)**	6	30	Awkward

Hit Points
0 1 2 3 4
5 6 7 8 9
10 11 12 13 **14**

Sanity
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19
20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29
30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39
40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49
50 51 52 **53** 54 55

Willpower
0 1 2 3 4
5 6 7 8 9
10 **11**

❑ Administration	50	❑ Insight	30	**Individual Bond**	**Score**
❑ Alertness	20	❑ Melee Weapons	30	Dr Forsythe, PhD supervisor	6
❑ Anthropology	70	❑ Natural World	30	Jake Farah, brother	6
❑ Appraise	40	❑ Navigate	10	Sam, housemate	6
❑ Archeology	50	❑ Occult	10		
❑ Art (Writing)	60	❑ Organizational Lore (University)	60	**Community Bond**	**Score**
❑ Athletics	50	❑ Persuade	40	Swimming team	6
❑ Charm	20	❑ Psychoanalyze	10	**Permanent Resources**	4
❑ Disguise	10	❑ Regional Lore (West Africa)	40	**Resource Checks**	❑
❑ Dodge	30	❑ Research	60	4 0 0	
❑ Drive	20	❑ Ride	10	At Hand Stowed Storage	
❑ Firearms	20	❑ Search	40		
❑ First Aid	10	❑ Stealth	30		
❑ Foreign Language (Latin)	30	❑ Survival (any)	10		
❑ Foreign Language (French)	40	❑ Swim	80		
❑ Harangue	10	❑ Track	10		
❑ Heavy Machinery	10	❑ Unarmed Combat	20		
❑ History	50	❑ Unnatural	5		

Weapon	Skill %	Base Range/yard	Damage	Lethality %	Kill Radius/yard
Bare Hands	20	—	1d4+1	—	—
Combat Knife	30	—	1d6+2	—	—
Thrown Knife	50	28	1d4+2	—	—
Thrown Hand Grenade	50	51	—	12	4
Crowbar	30	—	1d8+2	—	—
SIG-Sauer P220	20	15	1d10	—	—
With damage bonus	20	15	1d10+2	—	—

Player	RogerBW	Tina	BigJackBrass	Lordof1	Riddles
Character	Rev. Frederick Spencer	Albertina Cooke	Benjamin Howarth	Prof. Erogenous Zane	Capt. Michael Newman
STR	14	13	17	12	14
CON	11	8	11	10	15
DEX	15	14	14	14	14
INT	10	12	12	10	8
POW	12	8	18	9	13
CHA	17	14	7	18	15
Sanity	60	40	90	45	65
Administration	10	10	10	10	50
Alertness	60	50	20	40	40
Anthropology	40	0	0	30	0
Appraise	10	40	10	10	10
Art (Writing)	0	0	0	20	0
Athletics	30	50	30	30	70
Charm	80	20	20	80	20
Disguise	10	10	10	30	10
Dodge	30	30	50	50	30
Drive	50	20	20	20	20
Empire Lore (British)	0	0	50	0	70
Firearms	20	40	50	40	70
First Aid	50	10	10	30	50
Foreign Language (Mandarin)	0	40	0	0	0
Harangue	10	10	10	10	10
Heavy Machinery	10	10	10	10	50
History	10	10	10	40	10
Insight	60	60	70	55	10
Law (English)	0	0	0	40	0
Law (Land)	0	0	50	0	0
Mechanical Knack	0	0	0	0	50
Melee Weapons	30	30	30	30	30
Military Training (Infantry)	0	0	0	0	50
Navigate	10	10	10	10	70
Occult	50	10	40	70	10
Persuade	60	20	70	50	20
Reassure	60	10	40	50	10
Regional Lore (Hampshire)	0	0	50	0	0
Research	30	10	10	50	10

of stat bonuses and default skill values, weapon stats, and so on. I'm sure many here will sing the praises of the hand-filled character sheet and the one covered in baroque scene-setting ornaments, and I won't say you're wrong, but when I'm playing I like to be able to find the numbers quickly and know they're up to date.

Furthermore, the same JSON character files can be combined to generate a GM's cheat sheet, with all the characters sorted into likely action order and with all their relevant numbers laid out as a table.

What is your playing style?

What do you look for in an RPG session?

That feels like a terribly broad question. I've been doing this gaming lark for a while, I like to think I'm reasonably good at it, but some of that is knowing my limitations: I don't mind a bit of improvisation, but I don't want to have to use *Fast-Talk (GM)* every time my character does something, so I'm not a fan of the sort of (often indie) game that needs a lot of improvisation and explaining why my "Captain Tightpants" ability *will* let me sneak away from these pirates, honest… just give me a Stealth skill, please.

What I like: games about people, games about societies. I'm happiest playing in something based on the real world, though often with hidden powers, or in an SF setting; I played a lot of dungeon bashes back in the day, and I've become frankly bored with them and with genre fantasy[4]. I don't want to hear about how magic can do anything; I want to hear about the things it can't do, that people still need to strive for. (And I love doing historical research.) The default campaign that I tend to gravitate towards running if not prevented is set in the 1920s-1930s and includes exploration of newly-discovered supernatural powers and threats,

Combat? It can be fun, but for my taste makes for a dull focus. Not interested in "evil races" or monsters that just exist to be killed; interested on people who don't look or think like Us.

So, in the end, my playing style? I want to think like the character. I run an emulation of their personality in my mind, and I am just the intermediary between that and the game world. This may mean snarky in-character comments, or unexpected solutions to the problem at hand. I want a game that will let me do that, rather than forcing me out to focus on numbers and game mechanics.

[4] A term invented by the compilers of *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy* because "rotefant" seemed excessively rude

Sound and Fury

Comments on E&A number 2

Patrick Riley: thinking of not wanting to play the official leader, when I used to run games at US Gen Con (1990s), I found players were generally eager to play a team leader with some kind of official status. Back at home in the UK, the team leader is always the last to be picked at a convention game, to the extent that when I ran an *Aliens*-ish game a while back I had to generate an NPC lieutenant. (His heart was in the right place. *Toujours l'audace!*)

Myles Corcoran: I boardgame too, and I also recommend *Flip 7*. Most people seem to pick it up quickly, enjoy their first game, and want to buy a copy, to the point that every vendor at UK Games Expo sold out of it.

Michael Cule: your Uncle might also drift the way of Kingfisher's White Rat (general troubleshooter, particularly of things that fall outside the obvious purviews of the other gods). And/or, he might be the specifically gay relative who is not reproductive;y active but still helps the family/clan.

Patrick Zoch: I salute your artistic approach; I'm strictly utilitarian. I don't use maps much, but when I do (over the videoconferencing where most of my RPGing happens these days) I tend to share in an Inkscape screen. The base layer can be a dungeon map, or a house plan, or basically any kind of scaled drawing; my software adds an appropriate grid over the top[5], then I stick on either character portraits or just text labels to show the movable elements. There's no lighting, of course, and concealment of regions is a matter of putting black rectangles over things before the fact, but I find this gets the job done with minimal effort on my part.

[5]in my case usually 2 yard hexes because ***GURPS***.

Jim Eckman: a thing I always say is "have you considered ***GURPS***?". Though I've been quite happy with the Mongoose Traveller of late, with a few house rules which I'll probably write about in the future. As for space travel, as I've got older I've become increasingly uncomfortable with reactionless drives: not just because they break a lot of quite important physics, but because a thing that turns power into thrust is a terror weapon, even more than the hugely powerful reactors of conventional SF spacecraft. Hook one up to an asteroid, take it a long way away, aim it at your target planet and apply solar power. And these days I do not believe in a society in which *nobody* decides to be a terrorist[6]. On the other hand, of course, any realistic reaction drive is going to take A While to get you anywhere in a star system. Which leaves me with something like *2300AD*'s stutterwarp, handwaving over proper motion and how you attain orbit aside. One could do much worse.

Mark A. Wilson: I can see the fun in that improv murder game, but I confess that as a GM who favours investigative adventures (and, I admit it, getting the *players* to solve complex puzzles, even if they're assisted by their characters' skills for gaining information) I like to have the solution to the mystery, and when the players work it out (with whatever level of clues they needed) they feel happy at having done so. *Brindlewood Bay*, where the players decide on the solution to the mystery once they have enough evidence and whoever they accuse turns out to have been the guilty party all along, is not for me.

[6]I am more inclined to feel that even more conventional starship captains have to be selected like ballistic missile submarine commanders in the modern day, able to be uncowed by the terrifying destructive power they control while not prone to taking it into their own hands.

Ficções interativas infantis – parte IV: *Os 33 porquinhos* (2017)

by Pedro Panhoca da Silva <ppanhoca@yahoo.com.br> and Camila Lourenço Panhoca <camiladopedro@gmail.com>

Fairy tales often get different versions, such as comics, films, cartoons and more. Some also have interactive versions. *Os 33 porquinhos* (2017) – "The 33 Little Pigs", in free translation –, for example, is an interactive adaptation of the classic 'The Three Little Pigs' with great graphic ambition: pages with two horizontal cuts that divide the book into three parts, one for each little pig[1].

Adapted by José Roberto Torero and Marcus Aurelius Pimenta – two award-winning Brazilian authors – the idea of this interactive children's book is to maintain the pattern of the original story, in which the 1st and 2nd piggies have their house destroyed by the Big Bad Wolf, but the 3rd resists. However, the reader has the power to choose which of the 11 little pigs in the 1st part of the book will be the 1st little pig, which of the 11 little pigs in the 2nd part of the book will be the 2nd little pig and which of the 11 little pigs in the 3rd part of the book will be the 3rd little pig. This means that the book offers 1331 reading possibilities (11^3). The book is illustrated by Edu Oliveira, who brings fun and creative illustrations to the most varied little pigs. Some of them are particularly amusing, such as Lord Bacon (a tycoon who built a mansion), Porcoátl (owner of an Aztec pyramid) and Granulfo (owner of a sand castle).

Ironically, the same ambitious and creative graphic design is its own negative point too: there are complaints from readers that the book tears easily, due to the careless handling of the book's strips. So it can be concluded that this is an interactive book designed for readers who are careful with their books.

Although it's not interactive fiction as we know it (gamebooks with no rule system, just non-sequential reading), *Os 33 porquinhos* is an interesting project that will amaze young readers with perhaps their first contact with a non-linear narrative. What's more, its power to expand the original narrative is immense, making it just as suitable for reading to a child at bedtime as it is for use in the classroom.

COMMENTS #2

BRIAN CHRISTOPHER MISIASZEK: Thank you for your words! *O porão* is exactly that: disturbing, revolting, and in a way gratifying because it allows the reader-player to do justice, at least in the field of fiction. You're right: dictatorships in South America unfortunately always have the same origins and the same outcomes. And it's been the same (again) for the last 10 years here too...

[1] You can see him visually in the publisher's official video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jCJJCM1XyvU&t=2s. It was not possible to find out whether it can generate English subtitles.

John Redden

Johnredden@AOL.com
(public facing e-mail address)

Reddened Stars number 1
(E ka hoku o ula`ula ` ole)

Web sites:
johntredden.com
southkonafarms.com
johnreddenauthor.com

Other e-mail:
southkonafarms@gmail.com

USPS:
88-2636 Mamalahoa Hwy Captain Cook HI 96704-8809

310.418.1550 mobile

808.328.2328 land line

Mix Natter And Anti-Natter

Regardance

We continuing to watch Andor, 2nd season. At times I find the plot confusing.

For Jurassic World Rebirth we actually went to a movie theater. I didn't like the film. Even though it had the usual excellent, I thought the story was under cooked. I was annoyed that they didn't describe the genetic origins of the biological engineering of the new dinosaurs.

I read The Collapsing Empire, The Consuming Fire and The Last Emperox by John Scalzi. Normally science fiction with pseudo royalty and all their titles annoy me, but the story in these three books is outstanding. The good woman and men and the bad women and men in the three books come to life in your mind. I highly recommend the three books.

The Fantastic Mr. Fox played at the Aloha Theater in Kainalua. Its a kids play and we enjoyed it.

Travel And Some Gaming

30-July my wife and myself caught a plane at Kona International Airport to San Francisco (SFO) hired a vehicle and drive to Santa Rosa. My granddaughters 10th birthday is the main event. While in Santa Rosa, my son

ran a game of Mouse Guard, with himself as the GM and playing (part time)an NPC. Myself, the granddaughter and my wife played. The characters are part of the introductory scenario. It is rare that a character dies in a Mouse Guard scenario. In the introductory scenario we need to deliver the mail to various mice warrens. A crow who wants the pouch for its nest is the protagonist the guard is up against.

We finally delivered the mail to Gilpledge. If bad stuff happens, your character is hungry, thirsty or with some other disadvantage. A silly but fun game. The family enjoyed it.

We also played “Ticket to Ride, San Francisco.” To traverse routes you need a ship, which is oddly a wildcard, vehicles, busses and of course trains. A fun variant.

For my granddaughters birthday, I gave her an electric guitar and amplifier. And on Friday, August 1st she played in a concert sponsored by the School of Rock and Roll. I was very much impressed by the school.

They taught the kids electric guitar, keyboard and drums. As an electric guitar player,she has her hair covering her face.

Sum Comments

Playing Style

-Simple rules that can be expanded due to fun or consent.
-Story line that involves quick conflict or surprising contradiction.
-One off, small or long term campaign with appropriate detail and backstory.
- As a GM, I don't prefer medieval fantasy. I prefer space fiction or soft horror.

Brian Rodgers, Denizens of the Library, an interesting concept and scenario.

Patrick Riley, I walked into a game store in Cotati, and found an isle of DnD5? Current edition? And an isle of Battle Tech with all the add ons and modules. How have times changed. That is it for FRP games in the store.

I like Iggy Smalls.

Gabriel Roark, Congratulations on ice skating. I have never been ice skating and given my current equilibrium, it wont happen. My wife grew up in Michigan and I remember her ice skating in Southern California. She was an excellent skater. I remember her telling me she was the only female in a pick-up game of ice hockey on a local lake when she was in high school.// I enjoyed reading your well organized zine in E&A #2.

Myles Corcoran, I wonder how Mausritter compares to Mouse Guard? It seems that maps are important to both.

Attronarc, I enjoyed the backstory before the usual deadly dungeon crawl.

Pedro and **Maira**, I'm glad to see your reviews in Ever and Anon.

George Phillies, re running a game based on a novel. My book Cosmos Nirvana drew on my League Cosmos game which I ran for a number of years. I enjoy Small Giant Class Liberation Army.

Mark Nemeth, that's an good writeup of the Dullstrand campaign. And as usual, your zines format and content are excellent.

Dylan Capel, when we finish the second season of Andor, I'll write up my take.

Michael Cule, I dug into your blog. I don't even want to get started on Trump. See my comments to Brian Misiaszek with regard to that subject.//Oooh … welcome to climate change.// I hope Hartley recovers from COVID. Several years ago, I caught it and didn't even know I had it. (I had

previously been vaccinated 3 times.)

Paul Holman, I've always enjoyed playing RQ. I gotta like a universe with ducks.

Patrick Zoch, Nice illustration of Cowle Keep.

Jim Eckman, re Traveller skill improvement: our Traveller GM always used GURPS for Traveller.

Heath Row, I'm Board sure seems better than the game store I visited in Northern California.//Goblin Quest, hmm … it looks interesting.

Mark Wilson, incorporate published scenarios, if it works for you.

Clark Timmins, hmm … a typical medieval module with errors?

Joshua Kronengold, nice personal gaming history.// I didn't change my zine title for Ever and Anon. I have changed my zine title more than once in the past. I like the one I have. I did ditch the decremented eights compliment number for standard decimal starting at zero.

Lisa Padol, I'm looking forward to Something Completely Different. I'm going to try to do something about a lack of gaming. My son is lecturing me on VTTRP. He claims he can manage the technology.// A DnD session that does not focus on combat. Yay!

Brian Misiaszek, The historical material for Havana Horror and the historical background of Gerardo Machado is excellent. I don't care if you went over the page limit. I am tempted running your scenario in our next NoCal con.// My son hit the nail on the head describing what we have going on in the USA and North America. Have you seen the movie, Back to the Future 2? We live in Back to the Future 2. Instead of Biff finding the almanac Trump found it.

Vassilakos, Collinson and Rader, I continue to enjoy the story telling episodes conceived in the Traveller framework.

Self, I never received my refund for A&E. Has anyone else been left out?

Where did Noah put the termites?

When reading in Braille, what is the greatest fear?
Do not touch.

Overlord's Annals

Attronarch, The Exalted Overlord of Uncontested Vastlands

Volume 4 · Issue 7 · September 2025

In this issue

Overlord's Annals is a monthly zine in which I share session reports from games I either run or have participated in.

Sometimes I also share our house rules and other reflections too. Art is primarily from players—see attributions for details.

In this issue I present three session reports from the ***Conquering the Barbarian Altanis*** Dungeons & Dragons campaign.

Adventurers undertake two independent treasure-seeking forays, and one untimely, but also unsurprising, ending.

Conquering the Barbarian Altanis Campaign

I'm running a weekly online old-school D&D game focused on underworld and wilderness adventures in the Wilderlands of High Fantasy Barbarian Altanis—a hostile land filled with ancient riches and antediluvian evils.

You can learn more about our campaign at: `https://attronarch.com/wilderlands`

Beginners and experienced players welcome alike. Write to me at `attronarch@mailbox.org` if you'd like to join.

Attributions

Text copyright © Attronarch, 2025. *Crypt of the Rose* illustration by kickmaniac. Typeset in LaTeX with Charter, a print-friendly typeface.

Conquering the Barbarian Altanis: Session 82

Adventurers

***Hagar the Hewer**, dwarf level 1*. Imagine Conan as dwarf.

***Orist**, elf level 1*. An elf.

***Ambros**, cleric level 2*. Follower of Aniu, Lord of Time.

***Darius**, clric level 2*. Follower of Dacron, God of Craftsmen.

***Rorik**, fighter level 1*. A fighter.

Thawmist 5th, Spiritday

A small party of four men-at-arms—Trocalus, Dragicus, Eterius, and Fluonaedra—led by Hagar and Orist found a statue they were looking for.

Their intelligence was spot on.

"Not even half a day away from Hara!"

A tall bronze statue stood on a stone dais. Its humanoid figure was obscured by its blocky nature—not a single curve in sight!

It was cube on top of cube, connected to another cube. A field of red roses surrounded the dais.

Hagar and Orist had decided to go on a little adventure of their own whilst waiting for Llyfed, Nolmbork, Derennan, Tarkus, and Oberon to return from the dungeon underneath the ruined tower south-west of Hara. They went there with a silver orb—a valuable one!—on some spurious idea that it might activate some portal.

Hagar and Orist, on the other hand, are much more pragmatic.

They are more interested in places that have wealth, treasure, and magic! And so they hunted down some leads to some ancient tomb.

Then then they hired the last capable people in Hara, for there were almost none left after the Invincible Overlord's recruitment campaign.

Now they stood in front of a statue where the tomb should be, but there was no tomb, and no doors, and no other clues.

Scanning the environs revealed that stone is more spent behind the statue.

It didn't take long to realise the statue can be pushed. Lo and behold, a spiral staircase was underneath it!

The dwarf and elf led the descent, whilst their retainers followed. They found themselves in the center of dank junction.

Floor was nothing but packed dirt. Wooden beams and frames gave structure to corridors. This was one shoddy tomb, even for humans.

Moving north, the party ran into a rotting wooden casket.

Poking it provoked its inhabitant to shamble out.

A decayed corpse sluggishly exited and mindlessly went for the closest person.

It was no match for a party of six.

"Orist! Behind!"

Two more corpses shambled from the junction.

"There's more!"

Fluonaedra yelled as even more corpses shambled in, this time from narrow tunnels to the left and right of the casket.

"Tighten up!" Hagar yelled whilst fighting off three zombies.

Orist turned around to face the two undead attacking from behind.

Dragicus froze, his morale broken, and watched in horror as Fluonaedra was disemboweled and eaten alive.

Her screams did not echo for the soil dampened the sounds.

Hagar smashed one after another zombie, but he himself was being worn down as well.

Claw after claw, bite after bite.

The dwarf couldn't withstand forever.

Dragicus soiled himself and tried to escape.

Alas, he was caught by two undead.

They broke his spine, scalped him, and then took out his brain.

Trocalus killed one zombie, but was soon killed himself as well.

At least his death was quick.

Orist soon succumbed to wounds as well, having killed only one undead.

The dwarf escaped death twice.

He and Eterius managed to destroy remaining undead.

A Pyrrhic, treasure-less victory.

The duo dragged Orist's corpse back to Hara.

Others were left behind to rot.

Thawmist 11th, Airday

"Fellow adventurers, do you maybe know how to cast Raise Dead? No. That's fine. May I interest you in an adventure instead?"

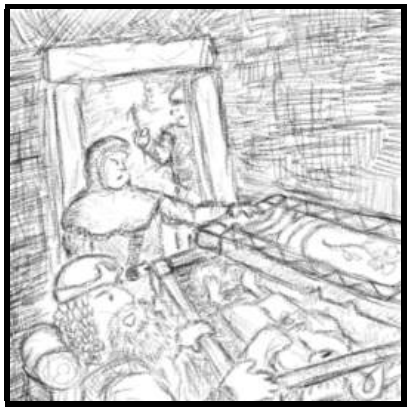
Having recovered from his wounds, Hagar went on another hiring spree. Rorik the Fighter, Ambros the Cleric of Aniu, and Darius the Cleric of Dacron joined him. All three were newcomers to Hara. They were ambitious enough to pick up on anything with "treasure" in its description whilst disregarding any red-flags, like for example, heavily scarred dwarf promising them riches underneath statue in a field of roses.

Either way, new party of above four plus Eterius—whom had now became an adventurer himself, demanding a proper share!—returned to the tomb. The statue was still pushed to the back and spiral staircase was wide open for anyone.

The corpses were where they left them, albeit in much worse shape. Maggots were feasting and flies were buzzing. Moving north led the party through a series of simple caves littered with open wooden caskets, rusted mining equipment and tools, and pools of water sipping through the cracks.

North east cave connected to both north and east spoke of the junction. Three small chambers, each containing a stone coffin with a motif of rose on top, adjoined along the south wall of the east tunnel.

Rorik and Hagar peeked into one. The corpse inside starred back at them. They shut the lid. The undead opened it, unhappy to be disturbed. Clerics turned it and then fighters smashed it to a pulp. This corpse was dressed in weathered blue robes.



Darius considered the fact they might be plundering a tomb of Lawful deity, but he couldn't connect rose motifs with any known deity.

Although there was nothing in the coffin, the party had decided to check other two sarcophagi in the same way.

The same situation repeated itself twice: an unhappy undead turned as it tried to get out, and then destroyed as it tried to get back in.

"Nothing! Empty!"

Following the south tunnel led the party to a human statue seated on a bronze throne.

The statue held a spear in its right hand, a mace on the hip, and a shield rested by its left side.

Ground in front of the statue was slightly depressed, as if something heavy left a mark.

Everything but the spear seemed to be made from one piece.

Hagar pulled on the spear. It came out effortlessly. Although plain, it was well balanced and felt very solid.

Two narrow tunnels flanked the statue. Both led to a small chamber with large stone coffin, each adorned with an elaborate rose motif.

"Let's check the coffins before we do anything else with the statue. . . "

The party opted to check the east chamber first. To surprise of no one, this sarcophagus also held a corpse that was unhappy with being disturbed.

What was different this time though, that other corpses had risen to protect it.

Adventurers destroyed them all with gusto.

"Shall we pull the throne with statue?"

Indeed, a staircase leading down was hidden underneath the throne.

Rorik and Hagar went down.

It was a small chamber with wax-sealed jar, chest, and crate. After a bit of deliberation and prodding, the party decided to take them all to Hara. They left all the corpses to rot, friend or foe.

Once back in town they counted their spoils: 976 silver pieces, a small agate, a small azurite, a tiger eye, a turquoise, an exquisitely carved bone comb, a brass candelabra, and a wrought silver necklace.

Nobody dared to open the jar.

"What if it contains an angry spirit?"

"Hey, where are Llyfed and co? They still haven't returned?"

"Deidamamina, the porter they hired to carry the silver orb has been spotted in Hara."

"Hmmm. . . We should ask her what she did to our friends."

Conquering the Barbarian Altanis: Session 83

Adventurers

***Hagar the Hewer**, dwarf level 1*. Imagine Conan as dwarf.

***Ambros**, cleric level 2*. Follower of Aniu, Lord of Time.

***Darius**, clric level 2*. Follower of Dacron, God of Craftsmen.

***Rorik**, fighter level 1*. A fighter.

***Bob the Dwarf**, dwarf level 1*. Midget with big beard in search of an adventure.

Thawmist 17th, Waterday

There she was, at the Black Eagle tavern, cheering and giggling with her two girlfriends and two aspiring suitors.

Deidamamina, the porter hired by Derennan a month ago. Derennan and his party haven't returned to Hara, and here she was, laughing.

Even worse, Hagar picked-up some talk of Deidamamina's sudden good fortune. So he cooked up a plan with Ambros, Rorik, Darius, and newly recruited Bob.

The last one will wait outside of the tavern in case Deidamamina tries to escape. Other four will approach her and gently demand to know where are their friends and what is the source of her new wealth.

Rorik the Beautiful was chosen as face for this diplomatic encounter.

"Excuse me for interruption, but I believe we owe you wages for your services."

Rorik politely introduced himself as he handed over a coin pouch. The girls giggled, while Deidamamina released a disappointed exhale.

"Thank you. I am saddened to hear you are not here to ask for my hand, like these two fine men."

These two fine men were not giggling, nor were they in courting mood anymore for a heavily armoured and armed man in fighting fit flanked by a muscle-bound dwarf and two clerics were quite a mood killer.

Both quickly vacated the table; their seats taken by the adventurers.

"So, what happened to our friends? Can you tell us more?"

"Oh, you have to tell them! She has a crazy story! She was a real hero!"

Deidamamina's girlfriends cheered her on. Encouraged, she leaned onto the table, and her eyes dilated as she recounted:

"Listen to this, you will not believe it! I was desperate for money so I accepted an offer from a crazy group of adventurers.

There was an elf, two dwarves, a zealot, and a scary ranger with necklace made of bones.

They gave me a massive silver ball to carry around for them.

We travelled for around two or three days until we reached some tall, ruined tower.

Next thing you know, I'm following them down some dark and scary corridors. And then they find secret doors! And all the time I'm trying to be between them because everything is so scary!

Anyway, the secret doors are opened by rotating one of the round symbols arranged in a circle... wait, let me draw that for you... see, like this.

Now comes the craziest part!

They all go inside, and we come to some alien chamber with low ceiling and raised dais.

In the middle of the chamber is this short pillar—just like you Hagar—with a depression in it.

Your friends take the ball off of me, and place it in there! And then it lights up, as does the dais!

And listen to this now!

All five of them stand by the dais, holding their hands, and then step on it. And they vanish!

Oh, and I was left all alone!

I waited there for hours, nay, for days.

But they did not return.

So I summoned up the courage, took the silver orb, and snuck out.

Oh how scary it was in the darkness, but I made it!

Once outside I returned back to Hara. And here I am!"

"Wow, fascinating story Deidamamina. And what happened to the silver orb?"

"I sold it of course!

Isn't that what adventurers do? They recover treasure from scary places and sell them in civilised cities like our great Hara!

At first I went to the jeweller but he gave me a really bad deal.

Next thing I know I am approached by a representative of Namelin family! I felt so special! And he gave me such a great offer"

Deidamamina now lowered her voice to whisper, and leaned in even closer to Rorik.

"three hundred and twenty gold pieces.

Yes! Right there, on the spot! I am settled for life!

Now just to find a fine man, one like yourself. . . "

Adventurers conversed with her for several hours.

Alas, the news of their last silver orb being acquired by the most ruthless merchant family in Hara were a tad deflating. And perhaps a bit worrying too.

They couldn't blame Deidamamina for she did not lie, nor gloat. She did all she could for their friends.

If only they had reached her before those damn Namelins did.

"Damn, what do we do?"

"It sounded like silver orb activates the dais."

"Perhaps there are more in the dungeon?"

"Look at her drawing. There are nine circles. We recovered nine orbs. One was donated to the Thieves' Guild and we kept one. The rest we sold. And now the one we had is with the Namelins."

"How about we approach them?"

"They'd spit straight into our face. And we are trying to build a rapport with the Imrael family. . . "

"How about we head straight to the dungeon? Perhaps we find them?"

"Or we all just die!"

"Is there a way to get into good graces with Namelins?"

"Well, they have this job ad that was up for months. They are offering 3 000 platinum pieces for Klekless Racoba—alive. Nobody made it yet."

"Forget it, that guy would dust us like mites."

"What then?!"

"Well, I spotted a new ad, from Lord of Midway, asking for enterprising adventurers to take care of a problem."

"Who is that guy? What is the pay?"

Asking around produced some satisfactory results. Lord Kyle was young, honest, and generous. And Midway was right mid way between Ractuan and Hara.

Thawmist 18th, Earthday

"Stop. Danger ahead."

The party had been following the trail from Hara to Dontrap and then downstream the river Farhills until they reached the point it merges with river Cedarwade and flows into the sea.

From there they followed the latter upstream—until they spotted two fresh cow corpses on the trail.

Both looked quite messed up.

Three dilapidated buildings flanked the trail: smithy and a simple house to the left, and stables to the right.

All three were shambolic.

Whilst inspecting the smithy, Hagar was surprised by two pony-sized carnivorous flies. They buzzed and lunged around.

Both Bob and Darius were tackled and defaced. Were it not for divine healing, both would be walking freak shows.

Hagar killed both flies.

"Let's go back to Hara, heal, and then come back to finish this."

Darius insisted on purging this place, for he is follower of Dacron, God of Craftsmen.

All agreed.

Thawmist 20th, Spiritday

The party was back, cow and giant fly corpses where they left them.

Inspecting the house revealed two more flies, as well as underground complex of tunnels with several rotting corpses full of maggots as well as one more fly.

Hagar terminated all three, and then set all corpses on fire. Adventurers poured all the oil they had in the hole.

"Let it burn."

Inspecting stable revealed an even larger tunneled complex, but no flies nor rotting corpses.

Plenty of debris and bones though.

Adventurers wouldn't be adventurers had they not frisked all the human remains.

That netted them eleven gold coins, an ivory flute beautifully carved to resemble a serpent, and a brass ear trumpet engraved with seahorses.

They rested at the smithy while house next door went up in flames.

Our heroes reached Midway on Dewsnap 1st, Airday.

Will they make more friends here than they did in Hara?

Only one way to find out.

Conquering the Barbarian Altanis: Session 84

Adventurers

***Derennan**, dwarf level 3*. A dwarf hailing from Western Wastes.

***Llyfed**, elf level 3*. Thin and balding elf whom also happens to be Rashomon's friend.

***Nolmbork**, dwarf level 2*. Portly, bald, red bearded, with an epic nose. On a mission to have a drink in every settlement in Wilderlands.

***Elvis**, elf level 1*. An elf.

***Oberon**, fighter level 3*. A tall, supple hunter adorned with bones and horns of his prey.

Thawmist 16th, Airday

"I banish ye to the grave you came from!"

Tarkus roared with the last atoms of strength in his body whilst brandishing an open book, the holy symbol of Bachontoi, God of Red Wisdom.

Bright crimson light flashed the chamber, forcing the undead to flee in terror. The cleric collapsed to his knees, completely expired. He felt warmth as red light washed over him.

Nolmbork, Llyfed, and Oberon first watched in awe, then in confusion, as Tarkus vanished and confused elf appeared in his place.

"Pardon my language, but who the fuck are you?" Llyfed inquired politely.

"I'm Elvis." the elf politely replied.

"The king is with us! We are saved!"

Derennan was still prostrated, stiff and motionless, on the ground.

"The ghouls will return any moment. Which way do we go back?"

Following a brief discussion the decision has been made to go all the way back to the doors that were flanked by banners with yellow hyena head.

Oberon and Elvis carried paralysed Derennan, while Llyfed and severely injured Nolmbork led the way.

Derennan recovered his facilities just in time to assist with lifting the portcullis.

"Pssst, I hear sobs?"

Indeed, Derennan picked up quiet weeps and snorts coming from the chamber filled with thick, azure fog.

"Derennan, Derennan!" child-like voices cried in Dwarven "Big nasty brutes took away our toys! They laughed as we tried to take them back! Derennan, Derennan! You are a hero, please get it back for us!"

Derennan Derennan calmed the ghosts and assured them he will do something about it.

The party navigated the fog chamber and successfully found their way out.

"Be careful. The doors are probably trapped." Indeed, multiple holes were on both sides of the door, going from ankle- to head-height.

Wounded Nolmbork found a safe spot in the chamber and rested a bit. Invisible hands braided what little remained of his beard and hair.

Llyfed and Oberon watched the doors, painfully aware of how it went last time they went into the place with similar banners.

Derennan pressed on the floor with his polearm.

Nothing much happened—until he put his whole bodyweight on it.

A number of spears went out, effectively blocking access to the doors.

But that did not prevent Elvis from wiggling his hips between the opening of the speartips.

He gingerly passed, tied a rope around the stone door handle, and passed it to Llyfed. The party gently pulled the doors ajar.

Elvis peeked in.

It was a large, dimly illuminated chamber.

And it reeked.

Five figures sat around a campfire in the middle of the room.

Two big, hulking; three smaller, but still larger and hairier than an average human, sulking.

Elvis stepped in, just beyond the doors, cleared his throat, and then cast Charm Person on the largest monster in range.

Then he fled back, shut the doors, and wiggled between the tips.

"Wasn't the plan to go in and talk to them?"

"Do you want to talk to them?"

"No, we just wait for them to come out and then we talk to them."

"But no one is coming out."

"Should we, and by we I mean you, go back in?"

Not even a minute later and Elvis was wiggling once more.

The door flung open as soon as the elf placed his hand on the handle.

And no, it was not due to his incredible strength.

A ten foot tall and five feet wide brute dressed in loincloth stood in the door frame, towering over Elvis.

It looked wholly unimpressed by this band of tattered and torn adventures.

Llyfed and company recognised the monster, for it was the same one it relieved them of all their coin just an hour or so ago.

The spears slowly retracted into the walls. Adventurers accepted the ogre's invitation to enter the chamber.

They were greeted by a second, smaller ogre, holding open a sack.

The party threw in all their remaining valuables—mostly coins and shiny objects recovered in the chamber adjoining the one with the pit.

This seventy by seventy feet room was lit by a number of torches in sconces, as well as campfire in the centre. Of three hyena-like humanoids, only one was standing.

The remaining two were seating by the fire. Ogres rejoined them, counting their new gains. The standing gnoll operated a disc-like protrusion next to the doors.

Once it finished, it took a good look at the adventurers and licked its lips. The party offered themselves as mercenaries.

Negotiations were led by Llyfed, who is fluent in Gnoll, while Elvis was translating for Derennan, Nolmbork, and Oberon.

The gnoll howled with laughter, wondering why should they hire someone so beat up and pathetic.

After all, they just voluntarily handed over everything they had to two big guys.

Elvis offered one ration in exchange for safe passage. This too was laughed off.

Alas, this triggered the brains of two sitting gnolls—they just realised they have some juicy, tender elf flesh right in front of them.

What a treat that would be after weeks of rats and vermin!

"Children" Derennan spoke in soft voice "you should leave now. Go to the fog and play there. I'll bring you your toys soon."

He did not want them to witness what was about to go down.

In final desperate attempt to negotiate, Llyfed mentioned scrolls of great magic. Surely that is worth something!

"Wait. . . " the gnoll snapped as he held the two hungry ones back "Do you know the land above? Can you draw it?"

"Yes. How about a deal? You lead us out and we make you a map."

"No. I take you to our leader and you talk with him."

Adventurers now whispered amongst themselves, agreeing to go along. What else do they have to lose? The two dwarves were ready to fight to the bitter end anyway.

Party was escorted down the winding corridors until a T-shaped junction. They took the right doors, into a chamber reeking of refuse and wet hair.

A dozen of gnolls nearly jumped from excitement as they've seen five captured pinkies enter.

"Down!" the chatty gnoll barked, and led the party into another chamber, this one behind a portcullis jammed open with five poleaxes.

There adventurers met Wa Ba, chieftain of the Tattered Fort tribe.

They promptly insulted him by letting him know they met his king few miles up north, to which Wa Ba went mad with rage.

"King?! King?! I am the king! I am the chief of mighty Tattered Fort tribe! There is no king over me!"

It didn't get much better for our band of negotiators. Refusing to accept their situation, they demanded more than they could get, and offered a lot less than was asked for. In the end the inevitable happened.

Derennan gripped his polearm and skewered the closest gnoll. Nolmbork took out two oil flasks and jumped at one of the beastmen. Elvis, Llyfed, and Oberon pulled their weapons too.

Wa Ba growled with ecstasy, and charged the party. As did all the other gnolls in the chieftain's chamber.

Elvis was slain with one mighty strike. Derennan took more punishment, but succumbed as well.

Nolmbork, our injured Nolmbork, did not fare much better. He was beaten senseless. Llyfed parried and blocked, back to back with Oberon. With the fighter going down, Llyfed was completely surrounded and pounded upon. The lights went out for him too.

Last thing he heard were cackles.

So disrespectful.

Exedra

Comments and responses to previous issues of Ever & Anon.

E&A 1

Congrats to Jim and everyone on launching a new APA!

RE: Heath Row / Engines & Emulators #1 Thank you! IdleDoodler also made the cover for E&A #1. Check out his website for more illustrations and other RPG goodies: `https://therecouldhavebeensnakes.wordpress.com/`

RE: Jim Vassilakos / Traveller Play-By-Email Zenon Coke might be an assassin, but he is a true gentleman. A professional too.

Rashomon tried everything he could to get rid of the sword. In the end he found a solution that worked out.

E&A 2

RE: John Redden / Reddened Stars number 0 Thank you, John! It is a delight to have all these illustration, sketches, and drawings from many players that have wandered the Barbarian Altanis.

RE: Brian Rogers / Denizens of the Library #1 In my experience kids, and young players in general, somehow make less deadly errors than adults.

Since our game has more than 20 players, that means there are varying skill levels as well as different risk appetites (and profiles!).

That might not lead to optimal game play, but sure does generate memorable sitations.

Brother Goose messed up pretty bad, was then given several chances by Kadrim, his deity, but managed to bungle them all up. And yet somehow he survived it all.

RE: Gabriel Roark / Bugbears & Ballyhoo #41 Thank you!

Regarding the roster, I have #1–20 and #561–593.

RE: Twisting the Rope #2 Our sessions run for three hours, with untimed play-by-post between them.

Since I run it as open table sandbox game, that meant that there were many, many players that rotated. There was a lot of dying too.

At the moment there are 26 players, of which one third is quite active. Thus far we have had maybe double or triple that—players that would come and try it out for a session or two and then leave.

As of writing this reply there is one name-level characters, and several mid-level characters.

Do note that session reports in the zine lag behind those published on the website. E.g. this issue concludes with session 84, while we are currently on session 141.

RE: Heath Row / Engines & Emulators #2 I'll pass your compliments to kickmaniac!

RE: Joshua Kronengold / Accidental Recall #1 There were several session where everything was snowballing. Still, no TPK. In fact, there was not a single TPK thus far. There is usually at least one survivor.

RE: Jim Vassilakos / Traveller Play-By-Email Vivid imagery is the best imagery. Them negotiating a release was much due to Nolmbork's wit and negotiation skills. The other party being less intelligent also played a role. . .

In general I run alignment as a very tangible thing. In Wilderlands Chaos is Chaos, not cute, quirky individual. Plus, in a world where literal Gods can be encountered, only an idiot would be Neutral.

In next issue

Exploring Midway and environs!

Bugbears & Ballyhoo #42

August 17, 2025, for Ever & Anon #3

Gabriel Roark
Rancho Cordova, CA
gabrielroark@gmail.com

Natter time. Celeste & I have now been ice skating six times (probably seven or eight by the time you see thish). It has become a highlight—often *the* highlight—of the week for us. The arena has two rinks (one for hockey games, one for recreational and figure skaters), locker rooms, a pro shop, party rooms, & a snack bar. Celeste crossed her first major rubicon on Session 5, skating without constant recourse to the wall or other skating aids. During Session 6, we were able to skate around the rink together, which is, of course, the purpose of our visits to the ice arena.

Gaming: I continue in Trevor's D&D 5e (2014) Keys from the Golden Vault campaign. We have been playing this campaign more often the last month than my AD&D campaign, so the PCs have levelled from 6 to 8 since lastish. Money in 5e usually felt somewhat pointless to me at Level 3 or 4; Trevor uses milestone level-ups, not XP for gold & fighting. No training costs, either. So, one has to make some pretty niche purchases to have a use for buckets of ducats, until Trevor introduced magic item creation to us (the entire party consists of spellcasters). We propose magic items that needed any side quest-worthy components, so it was a simple, if satisfying, affair.

Our 31st session of the Temple of Elemental Evil AD&D campaign brought the first PC death at the hands of an earth elemental. Ko To Taz, the spirit folk monk, entered the Earth Temple after the PCs saw that four earth elementals guarded the temple. The elementals had a fixed patrol pattern, but the party didn't pick up on it. Taz ~~is~~ was the fastest member of the party & resolved to reconnoiter the temple by running its perimeter. This would have been relatively safe, but Taz inexplicably opted to cut in at the southeast corner, which brought him within 10 feet of an elemental. This was exactly the distance to provoke attack. The creature's single punch took Taz to –13 hp. Trevor, Taz's player, offered that the elemental exploded poor Taz's head. Sounds about right. Poor Taz. Trevor still has two PCs to play 😊.

In this Issue

- Comments on E&A #2
- XP Tally for the Temple of Elemental Evil Campaign
- Nextish

COMMENTS ON E&A #2

Egoscan Index:

- Cover
- Reddened Starts No. 0
- Denizens of the Library #1
- Quasipseudoludognostication #2
- Twisting the Rope #2
- Overlord's Annals 4(6)
- Back to Brazilian Gamebooks – Part VIII
- A Rhodomontadulous Promenade #2
- The Seedling #49
- Attacks of Opportunity Iss. One
- The Phoenix Nest
- De Ludis Elficis Fictis
- The Dragon's Beard #87
- Ronin Engineer
- Engines & Emulators #2
- Bumbling Through Dungeons #2
- B11½, Expurgated Version
- Accidental Recall #1
- An Unlooked For Zine #1
- Age of Menace 239
- Traveller Play-By-Email

Cover: Hair Metal Cleric Meets His Maker (Mitch Hyde)

But first that cleric will meet his un-maker!

Reddened Stars Number 0 (John Redden)

You restarted your zine's numbering at zero; how will the issue numbers proceed from here?

My sympathies on the ICE raid at your farm. A pox on the current administration!

RYCT on your APA involvement, I will keep an eye out for volumes of *Wild Hunt*. Too bad your zine did not make it into *The Lords of Chaos*; I have issues 1–13 in PDF.

RYCT Attronarch, Mitch, Nemeth, & me, glad that you enjoy the write-ups.

RYCT on last month's IgTheme, thank you. I liked that topic because it forced self-reflection on the teaching aspect of my gaming practice & how best to suit the needs of players. Extra bonus reading others' thoughts on the matter.

Denizens of the Library #1 (Rogers)

Hello again, Brian! I am glad that you decided to join us in this new venture. I like the new zine title.

RYCT on refereeing for younger players, it is a hoot, all right! I've run RPGs for children as young as eight (that was my daughter's age when I taught her to play D&D). The enthusiasm is great, as are all the crazy things that kids say & attempt to pull off in RPGs.

Nice touch, tying Groups A & B to one another. How did the players receive it?

Thank you for the new word (vexillology).

I'm looking forward to reading about your B/X homebrew & am game to compare notes.

Quasipseudoludognostication #2 (Riley)

Yep, when we were in elementary school, our Google feed was called, "Whatever cool thing your classmate brought to school that day." Use of "we don't know what we are doing" rules: same! Monster Manuals were the gateway drug to AD&D at my elementary and junior high schools. Star Frontiers didn't really take with us, but Top Secret held our interest a bit longer. We didn't play Rolemaster

but did get into Middle Earth Role Playing. Toon, Car Wars (Sunday Drivers!), Man to Man, & GURPS. Very, very good times.

RY PCs: Those are fun backgrounds.

I also remain ambivalent about 5e's short/long rest mechanic. It seems to me that the attendant hit point recovery would have more verisimilitude if there was a base threshold at which hp recovery stops. Since at least the AD&D days, D&D rules held that a small proportion of PC hp represent the capacity to withstand physical damage, especially as one levels & gains many hp. It stands to reason that an ordinary, overnight sleep would not restore the "physical" hp. Maybe half of one's starting hit die?

Twisting the Rope #2 (Myles)

That was an enjoyable Mausritter play report. It sounds like you & your players have struck a suitable vibe.

RYQ about names in play reports, whenever I contemplate publishing one somewhere, I check in with my players to make sure they are cool with it. Then I ask whether they wish me to withhold their name & just use the PC name(s) or what. Typically, I shy away from using real last names unless the play report is only for distribution to the gaming group.

RYCT me on gaining character levels, I hear you. In the 5e campaigns that I've played in, the referee uses milestone levelling. In the first two campaigns, it felt like player skill had rather little to do with acquiring the levels, so I was not very excited about it. I have some other gripes about 5e but will leave off them for now cos it might be lack of knowledge on my part & doesn't concern levelling, anyway. In our Keys from the Golden Vault campaign, milestone levelling seems very consistent & each adventure is challenging enough that levelling after one heist feels appropriate.

Concerning the "Papers & Paychecks" aspect of treasure and fighting for XP in AD&D, one thing that really keeps my whole group going with it is that they are into it. The Frog Leg Gang (as the PCs style themselves) are artful dungeon dismantlers, hauling off everything that they can conceivably sell or use. Whatever doesn't go to training, new gear, & living expenses goes to player-driven world-building: they hire chumps to fix old moat houses, train horses, carry treasure, & so forth. The players (and PCs) dicker over whether to keep magic items in the party or sell them (for money & more XP), keep track of their chumps' salaries, & generally behave like a tethered warband working to sustain themselves as they try to rid the viscounty of the Temple of Elemental Evil. Would it work for every ref or player group? Nah. But it really works in this one.

Overlord's Annals 4(6) (Attronarch)

Quote of the month: "Adventurers head into unknown whilst holding hands."

RE Llyfed's bio: Is being Rashomon's friend the most relevant descriptor anymore? I thought the Rashman died a while ago. Just saying.

Your description of 90 minutes of delving by your PCs sounds like many a session in our AD&D campaign, especially ignoring secret doors.

Back to Brazilian Gamebooks – Part VIII (Pedro & Maira)

Congratulations on getting published in *Ecos da Fantasia*! Roughly how many pages are your 50 sections of

text? Since you are familiar with Athos Beuren's work, did you find it easy to use his game system in your contribution?

A Rhodomontadulous Promenade #2 (George)

Indeed, George, commenting on a hefty APA demands fortitude. Do you have a routine for reading & writing for APAs? I've found that having a staged routine helps me avoid feeling either burnout or anxiousness about contributing. Finding the requisite time poses a challenge, but staging my contributions mitigates time constraints to a variable degree each month. My guiding principles in preparing a zine for an APA are: (1) write gaming-related articles that interest me or that I think would interest other contributors, (2) comment on the material that interests me, and (3) let myself off the hook about commenting on every zine, every issue; I reckon that hanging around the pages of an APA demonstrates my interest & enjoyment of others' work, & I will eventually get around to having interacted with each contributor at some point. Sometimes I am out of ideas & don't have anything in the Principle 1 bucket.

Thank you for your encouragement. Regarding my short analysis of level-up in AD&D, if you have any questions or hypotheses for us to explore, I am all ears. I might work out more that is worth sharing on my own & shall do so if I hit on something notable.

I look forward to reading more about your OD&D campaign & development of your story.

The Seedling #49 (Nemeth)

The illustration of the sinking ship employs good contrasting colors.

RE: "In this setting, orcs and similar humanoid monsters do not converse, cooperate, or negotiate with humans." Harsh realm. Are "similar humanoid monsters" goblinoids or goblinoids plus giant-class creatures? I am also curious what the in-universe reason is for this communication breakdown. If you discussed this in your campaign setup articles in A&E, you can just say so & I will look it up.

RE "Daggerheart Revisited": I hope you gave your wizard a French name (*snicker*). I also enjoy game artwork that has personality & definite individual style. Growing up with Ian Miller, John Blanche, Larry Elmore, Darlene, Clyde Caldwell, & Keith Parkinson's artwork in my games, well, let's just say that most of the CG illustrations more prevalent today are a beggar's banquet.

I do not think that my table would enjoy Daggerheart's manner of gaming out violent conflict. I do not object to freeform (some of my friends might) but do find a definite round/turn structure helpful for maintaining fairness all around.

RYCTM: Yes, the Frog Leg Gang has been levelling at a steady pace. In our latest session (as of this writing) the party had its first character death. That PC was levelled abruptly.

Retired at 53?? I wouldn't want to retire in the way you had to, Mark, but I would be pleased to be retiring two years from now. I am glad that you are happy with retirement. I plan to retire at 58. I will have 20 years of state government service by then, which means I will retire with full medical coverage for both Celeste & me, for life.

Attacks of Opportunity Issue One (Dylan)

Great zine title! I think many of us are maintaining the structure of our A&E zines & deciding what to do next.

Poignant observations about the depredations of insurgency & war.

Collected 28 sounds amazing.

The Phoenix Nest (Cule)

RE Iggy's Theme: Your approach to handling your PCs' opponents sounds gutsy but is also practical. It seems wise to maintain a certain level of looseness until you know the PCs will face off against an adversary. PCs do not remain static in their abilities for long, players learn new tricks, & the referee should have some opponents that can keep up with them. Waiting till the last minute to fully stat out opponents instead of doing so early on also means that the referee saves themselves the work of updating the NPC(s) at the last minute.

De Ludis Elficis Fictis (Pum)

RYCT Mitch on infravision & mapping in AD&D: Infravision is a different mode of vision, as I understand it. Consider this quote from the DMG, "Characters and various creatures with infravisual capability…are basically picking up radiation from their surroundings. Therefore they note *differences* in thermal radiation, hot or cold." (page 59, emphasis in original.) The discussion of infravision goes on, leaving the impression of less precise, Predator-type sight. Unless a dungeon cartographer makes a special ink that has temperature-contrasting qualities (or is simply magically cooler or warmer than parchment), our rule is that "man cannot map by infravision alone." The Players Handbook also gives the impression that mapping underground without illumination is impossible: "However, as many characters can only see in light which is normal to the human visual spectrum, *and mapping requires light also*, some form of light generating device is necessary for activities in dungeons or at night" (page 102, emphasis added). I find this less persuasive on its own than the DMG quote because a viable reading of the sentence is that Gygax meant that humans & other creatures without infravision need a light source to map. Still, the way it is set off by parenthetical commas, it is more sensible to me that mapping requiring light is a related issue but not peculiar only to those without infravision. I prefer to read it in concert with the DMG & require that mappers have a visible-spectrum light source to scribble in the dark.

The Dragon's Beard #87 (Zoch)

RE the IgTheme: One of the great joys of refereeing many RPGs is creating adversaries with memorable personalities, cool gear, & impressive abilities. Your remarks are on point.

Excellent maps of Cowle Keep! You did a good job lining up the various stories & the flow makes sense. I agree that the hachured pattern is a little busy for these maps & struggle with its use in my own mapping. I recall most building & dungeon maps in Middle Earth Role Playing rendering walls in solid black in plan views. It is serviceable & undistracting, but also a little uninspiring.

RYCT George: It never occurred to me or my gaming buddies to set off with a retinue, even when one of us rolled up a noble to play in Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay; it took us embarrassingly long to realize that "1d6 hangers-on" (it might have been mistyped as

"hanger-ons" were not baldrics but fawning associates & potential bodyguards! Alternatively, a gaming group could decide that the other PCs are the hangers-on. Definitely a missed opportunity for me.

Ronin Engineer (Jim Eckman)

RE the IgTheme & your Bushido games: creating famous martial arts schools & teachers sounds like loads of fun.

I appreciate your explanation about Empire of the Petal Throne & read a little about "Barker's legacy." I had no idea.

Engines & Emulators #2 (Heath Row)

Why do you call your furnished apartment the Infernal Wilson? Cracks me up. Apropos of nothing, I see that there is a Cylon, Wisconsin. Town motto? "By your command!"

RE Goblin Quest: A goblin carrying around a copy of Rilke! Fantastic. You could have named him Kawfeeld of the Mudborn Avengers. What a fun game report.

RYCTM: Glad you liked the introduction! Harpy, er, happy to be here!

Bumbling Through Dungeons #2 (Mark A. Wilson)

I like the metagaming conceit behind your monk PC. Using her personality to ground yourself during games is a novel (to me) idea & I'm hard pressed to see it not being worthwhile. I would love to hear how it goes if you decide to implement this mindful gaming.

B11½ - The Royal Harvest Festival Apophenia, Expurgated Version (AE7KL)

Attractively rendered maps. Your cut-up process reminds me of various exercises by the Oulipo. It also recalls my stocking the numerous unstocked rooms that David Hargrave left in his published *Arduin Dungeons*; his maps sometimes make about as much sense as a découpé. I will email to request the unexpurgated version of B11½.

Accidental Recall #1 (Joshua)

Hey, you are back here, too! Noice.

RE the non-snoozer D&D game: Excellent time-travel scheme. And what a geographical oddity you were in: two weeks from everywhere!

An Unlooked For Zine #1 (Lisa)

Welcome to E&A, Lisa. My mind was blown when I first saw *The Killer*. *Hardboiled* was excellent as well. John Woo & company provided surprisingly human(e) moments in these over-the-top (and brilliantly choreographed) action flicks.

RYCTM: Good advice on teaching an RPG at a con. Your four points are equally applicable to a non-con game but would benefit from the luxury of more time to accomplish these things, naturally.

Age of Menace 239 (Misiaszek)

It's good to hear that Peter Hildreth plans to join the party after Gencon.

RE finding vintage HARN & Shadow World modules for $10 Canadian each, did you scoop them?

Brian, your research & gamification of 1930s Havana is impressive! Thank you for the thoroughly enjoyable read.

RYCT Jim V. on creativity: I bet your patients benefit from the science & art of your medical practice. I have rubbed against the sort of professional, rote conservatism that you alluded to in archaeology & cultural resources management. Bureaucrat that I am these days, I am positive that there are consulting archaeologists out there that think I am slavishly conservative in my requirements.

Congratulations to Lauren! It heartens me to see parents with such pride in their cool kids.

Traveller Play-By-Email, Plankwell Campaign, Ch. 47 (Jim & Timothy)

The Plankwell installment was shorter than usual but well written just the same.

RYCT Attronarch on Dungeon Economics: I think whether dungeon denizens should use some of their loot to buy food from local villagers depends on the type of campaign we're talking about. Attronarch's game uses Moldvay & Cook Basic/Expert (B/X) D&D rules, and therefore probably cleaves to the Law–Neutrality–Chaos alignment spectrum. Neutrals could certainly trade with most anybody. Chaotics might have a hard time if surface-dwellers are mainly Lawful. All of this is subject to the rules of the referee's milieu, of course, which can permit freer congress among social groups of different alignments. Note, however, that dungeon dwellers might not be keen on the risk of accidentally leading surface dwellers back to their home.

Stonehell Dungeon, which I used in our long-paused Arduin Grimoire campaign, has cool dungeon economics. On the first dungeon level, there is a market known as Kobold Korners, & residents from all over Stonehell come to trade, gossip, recreate, & spy. One of the PCs in the campaign (I think it was Shifty, hobbit thief) bought a kobold business but hired the original proprietor to keep running it. She likes not having the responsibility of ownership for a change. Kobold Korners is different from what you are talking about in that the merchants do not go to the surface to seek out trade but will trade with surface dwellers who visit Stonehell without causing trouble in the Korners.

A few of the PCs (Shifty & Flardin the stingy dwarven alchemist) set up a side business supplying the weapons dealer in Kobold Korners with a supply of weapons designed to hold up in the short term but fail before too long. Shifty & Flardin think this scheme will net them a lot of moolah. It is at least as likely to get them in trouble eventually.

RYCTM & George on level advancement in AD&D: Automatic level-up upon hitting the requisite XP threshold has its appeal & I have no complaints about it in principle. My friends have embraced training for level advancement, though, precisely because we use the conceit to create roleplaying opportunities. In the Temple of Elemental Evil (ToEE) campaign, the PCs are fortunate to have a home base in Hommlet & to have gained favor with the local authorities & the viscount. The viscount & his agents in Hommlet saw to it that advisors & mentors are available to the PCs as they assail the eponymous temple, allowing the PCs to stay in Hommlet for training. There are even some incognito evil types in the hamlet that the party thieves can work with. So, training is local.

Often, one or more of the PCs lacks the funds to train when they have

sufficient XP. This is where intraparty loans, favors (side quests) for locals, & the reluctant sale of magic items come into play. Since all but one player has two or more PCs, they can opt (and have done) to adventure in smaller groups. Lately, most PCs have opted to hang around Hommlet & their moat house while their mates train to do things like supervise the moat house repairs, take on hirelings, work on personal projects, spy, & ingratiate themselves with the locals. If I granted automatic level-up to the PCs, I guarantee they would invest in Hommlet much less. Either way is fine with me if we are having a great time. I can imagine many situations in which having to train to gain levels would suck rocks, like lengthy overland (true wilderness) expeditions, though.

The PCs in the ToEE campaign are advancing more slowly than in your AD&D games mainly because their party is large relative to some of the threats encountered, and certainly to the treasure available. I give XP for magic items & all treasure recovered. The party is simply on the large side for this adventure, I think. Speaking of which…

XP Tally for the ToEE Campaign

Between *Bugbears & Ballyhoo* #33 and 37 (written for *Alarums & Excursions*), inclusive, I provided session reports that detailed the PCs' XP earnings. That string of B&Bs covered the first nine sessions of the campaign. I put the project on hiatus because my notes were poor around Session 10 & life was busy (read: I wrote kurzzines for a bit). Our new APA & discussions have reinvigorated me, so I am ready to give it a go again. For those who missed the first nine session reports & those who would rather not reread those issues of B&B, here is a summary of what transpired leading up to Session 10.

Our ToEE campaign uses the AD&D rules, including *Unearthed Arcana* (although we left the paladin as a fighter subclass). I had an original monochrome copy of the first module in the series sitting around the Dungeon (our gaming room) & the Fleming brothers spotted it. They learned to play D&D from their dad using the AD&D rules, so they were stoked to see my AD&D collection & asked me to run AD&D for our group. I use Goodman Games' reprint of the ToEE modules so as not to muck up my original module & cos some of the D&D 5e conversion material in the second half of the reprint has proved useful in running the campaign.

The ToEE modules are set in Greyhawk, specifically in the Kron Hills & Gnarley Forest of the Viscounty of Verbobonc (VBB for short). The PCs travelled to the "village" (it is really a hamlet) of Hommlet from VBB for reasons peculiar to their individual PCs. They began developing common cause after a bandit attack on the way to Hommlet. Upon arriving in the hamlet, they learned that the ToEE might be on the rise again after a 10-year dormant period. Visible activity attributable to the ToEE & its agents pointed to an outpost near Hommlet: the abandoned moat house. The PCs found & explored the moat house. After fighting some giant frogs & hosting a feast featuring roast frogs' legs, the PCs took on the name of Frog Leg Gang. By the close of Session 9, the Frog Leg Gang had closed off one entrance to the moat house dungeon & killed the leader (Lareth the Beautiful) of this ToEE outpost. "You think this story's over but it's ready to begin."

Here are the XP gains for the Frog Leg Gang at the end of Session 9/start of Session 10:

- **Jack Ironheart** (human paladin 1)
  - Total XP: 1,755
  - Level 2 requires 2,751 XP
- **John Ironheart** (human cleric 1)
  - Total XP: 1,755
  - Level 2 requires 1,501 XP
  - John can train to Level 2
- **Ekim Gnimelf** (wood elf thief 1)
  - High Dex: +10% to XP
  - Total XP: 2,099
  - Level 2 requires 1,251 XP
  - Ekim can train to Level 2
- **Ttam Gnimelf** (wood elf ranger 1/magic-user 1)
  - 1,151/1,151 XP
  - Level 2 requires 2,251/2,501 XP
- **Dame Sonya Ravenclaw** (human cavalier 1)
  - Total XP: 2,582
  - Level 2 requires 2,501 XP
  - Sonya can train to Level 2
- **Lady Moira Ravenclaw** (human magic-user 1)
  - High Int: +10% to XP
  - Total XP: 2,549
  - Level 2 requires 2,501 XP
  - Moira can train to Level 2
- **New Moon** (elven bard 1)
  - Total XP: 1,782
  - Level 2 requires 2,001 XP
- **Fern** (human druid 1)
  - Total XP: 1,782
  - Level 2 requires 2,001 XP
- **Amelie Atugar** (half-orc cleric 1)
  - Total XP: 1,782
  - Level 2 requires 1,501 XP
  - Amelie can train to Level 2
- **Omar Atugar** (half-orc fighter 1)
  - High Str: +10% to XP
  - Total XP: 2,034
  - Level 2 requires 2,001 XP
  - Omar can train to Level 2
- **Gobi** (gnome illusionist 1/thief 1)
  - High Dex & Int: +10% XP
  - Total XP: 1,765/1,765
  - Level 2 requires 2,251/1,251 XP
  - Gobi can train to Level 2 thief

New Moon composed these play reports, although I exercised editorial prerogative as needed.

SESSION 10. REAPING 22–23 (5/5/2024)

New Moon's account & my notes suggest that the PCs did not train at once, certainly due to a lack of funds.

The day after the Frog Leg Gang's return to Hommlet was Reaping 22. The Froggers caught up with the viscount's agents, Rufus & Burne, who presented the Froggers (through the Ironheart brothers) with an edict that the PCs were to keep the moat house clear of ToEE agents, put it in good repair, & staff it as an outpost in the protection of Hommlet & the High Road. In return for this service, the Froggers naturally could call the moat house home. The Froggers were stoked.

At about 10 a.m., the PCs departed Hommlet for the moat house, arriving about 2 p.m. The Froggers set about

making sure that the upper works of the fortification were cleared of threats. In the process, the party convinced the giant spider that lived in the northwestern tower to leave (once again, having wood elves in the party came in handy, as they can converse with "woodland creatures"). Similarly, the Gnimelf brothers prevented a pointless fracas with a dozen giant rats by parley & the offer of food. The Froggers bested a giant snake & three zombies in combat. Their explorations netted some considerable treasure as well.

The party took short watches & the night passed uneventfully. After their rest, the party headed down the hallway into the dungeon, with the thieves taking lead. After 120 feet, the hallway ended in another corridor. There were stairs going down, another corridor to their right, & a doorway at the end of the earlier hallway facing north. There was a large room, 40 feet by 50 feet with five doors: three on the south side, one on the west side, & one on the north side. The south-central door had a mechanism, the southwest door opened into a closet, & the west door opened to a 40-foot hallway that opened into the corner of a room. At the end of the hallway was a large, dimly visible gnoll. Ttam & Ekim immediately opened fire with their bows, killing one of the gnolls. Then Omar & Sonja charged the remaining gnolls, beginning the slaughter. One phantasmal force & sleep spell later, only two of nine gnolls survived. New Moon convinced the surviving gnolls to map out the rest of the cave system in exchange for leaving with their lives & their personal weapons. They did so & described the location of some ghouls, a bugbear, & a giant lobster. The party gathered the valuables & equipment and returned to Lareth's lair, resting to recover their spells. Afterward, the party walked through the tunnels toward the place the gnolls described as a bugbear lair. On the way, we saw the descending portcullis trap (it had already been sprung). As we enter an "E" shaped room, we heard speech in the hallway.

SESSION 11 REAPING 23–24 (6/2/2024)

In the "E" room, Lady Raven identified the speech as bugbear. He declared that we were trespassing, & Lady Raven demanded that the bugbears leave. When we proved that we killed Lareth, they agreed to leave, & offered to give information for a price. We offered to give them 80 silver pieces. They verified the information that the gnolls gave us & said that there were at least six ghouls in the room at the other end of the dungeon, then they left. Nothing of value was found in the bugbear lair. When the party opened the doors in the "E" room, the party found small empty rooms. The eastern middle door had a chain attached to it which triggered something that made a noise further down the dungeon.

The party then formed up & marched back down the hallway to see what was triggered. We lifted the portcullis & verified that there were stairs beyond it & that they ended in a blank wall. The party then made its way to the giant lobster lair & Fern cast invisibility to animals on Ttam as he went down the stairs. At the bottom, Ttam found a 30-foot-by-30-foot room with a large pool of water in the center. In the pool, a giant lobster swam around. Ttam went back up the stairs & the party went back to their camp.

After sleeping, memorizing spells, & fetching four barrels of oil, the party heads to the location the gnolls described as the ghoul's residence. On

the way, we encountered a trio of gnolls. New Moon convinced the gnolls to leave & immediately afterward, we encountered some ghouls. There were four, two of which we immediately dispatched & wounded a third. The two surviving ghouls ran away around the corner into the larger room. They were highlighted with faerie fire as they ran off & no other ghouls were visible in the room. We investigated the crypt to check for unpleasant surprises and treasure.

SESSION 12 REAPING 24–25 (6/23/2024)

The party decided to follow the ghoul down the crack of doom in the south wall with Sonja & Omar in the front. There was a roughly pentagonal room at the end of a 30-foot passageway with a 30-foot passageway heading west that split diagonally. A gold coin was found in the pentagon, in the west tunnel, & in front of the two doors at the end of the split. The tunnels all narrowed to be nearly impassable & the party retreated.

The party then decided to rest & hunt the lobster by baiting it with a dead gnoll & dragging it up the stairs. When we got close to our lair, however, we heard Ttam's wolf Lobo barking & Lady Raven informed us (through Mr. More's eyes) that a "large humanoid" had entered the lair. Ttam ran through the door & immediately slaughtered the ogre he found with 4 arrows, all fired on the surprise round.

The party then went fishing for lobster. We set a grappling hook inside of the ogre's head & dropped it into the pool. The lobster grabbed the bait & was dragged out of the water where it was reduced (spell), shot with arrows, impaled on a lance & smashed with a scimitar. Then Jack, John, New Moon, & Baldrick dragged it up the stairs & out to Lareth's Corner. Meanwhile, the rest of the crew searched the pool & found a platinum brooch, a broadsword, a bone tube with some strange writing inside, & money. The party immediately burned the corpses & dragged the giant crawdad to town to share the meat & identify/sell our loot. We prepared the feast. New Moon sang at the feast.

End Sessions 10–12

I decided to award XP for defeating opponents at the end of Session 12 to get it out of the way. The players thought that their PCs might need to apportion loot carefully so that people could get training, and the players wanted to roleplay this out. Treasure XP, then, was to be determined at the beginning of Session 13. Let's get on with the tally for the opponent XP.

Following the DMG's guidance, I adjusted the XP value of individual foes according to the threat level that they posed to the Froggers and, if the PCs dispatched foes through trickery, how likely it was to be a permanent solution. Threat level is determined as a ratio of total foe hit dice (HD) to total PC HD per encounter.

- Giant spider: 125.0 XP
- Giant snake: 126.0 XP
- 12 giant rats: 14.0 XP
- 3 zombies: 49.0 XP
- 9 gnolls: 258.5 XP
- 6 bugbears: 442.2 XP
- 3 ghouls: 86.9 XP
- Giant crayfish: 44.0 XP

Total: 1,145.6 XP/11 = 104 XP per PC. Thus, at the end of Session 12, the PC XP tally stands at:

- **Jack Ironheart** (human paladin 1)
  - Total XP: 1,859
  - Level 2 requires 2,751 XP
- **John Ironheart** (human cleric 1)
  - Total XP: 1,859
  - Level 2 requires 1,501 XP
  - John can train to Level 2
- **Ekim Gnimelf** (wood elf thief 1)
  - High Dex: +10% to XP
  - Total XP: 2,099
  - Level 2 requires 1,251 XP
  - Ekim can train to Level 2
- **Ttam Gnimelf** (wood elf ranger 1/magic-user 1)
  - 1,203/1,203 XP
  - Level 2 requires 2,251/2,501 XP
- **Dame Sonya Ravenclaw** (human cavalier 1)
  - Total XP: 2,582
  - Level 2 requires 2,501 XP
  - Sonya can train to Level 2
- **Lady Moira Ravenclaw** (human magic-user 1)
  - High Int: +10% to XP
  - Total XP: 2,549
  - Level 2 requires 2,501 XP
  - Moira can train to Level 2
- **New Moon** (elven bard 1)
  - Total XP: 1,886
  - Level 2 requires 2,001 XP
- **Fern** (human druid 1)
  - Total XP: 1,886
  - Level 2 requires 2,001 XP
- **Amelie Atugar** (half-orc cleric 1)
  - Total XP: 1,782
  - Level 2 requires 1,501 XP
  - Amelie can train to Level 2
- **Omar Atugar** (half-orc fighter 1)
  - High Str: +10% to XP
  - Total XP: 2,034
  - Level 2 requires 2,001 XP
  - Omar can train to Level 2
- **Gobi** (gnome illusionist 1/thief 1)
  - High Dex & Int: +10% XP
  - Total XP: 1,822/1,765
  - Level 2 requires 2,251/1,251 XP
  - Gobi can train to Level 2 thief

You might have noticed that several of the Froggers essentially lost out on XP; once a character has earned enough XP to advance a level, they cannot earn more until they have trained (if the referee is using the training rules). Accordingly, John, Ekim, Sonya, Moira, Amelie, & Omar did not earn XP for these sessions. Gobi could not earn XP as a thief but did advance as an illusionist, albeit at half rate. Note that there is a balance here. I am not sure that it completely makes for level scales (hur hur hur), but it does make a difference. The presence of the party in full strength requires that XP awards for defeating opponents be divided by the full strength of the party (that is, by 11). The party members who could still earn XP benefitted from the assistance of their mates but earned a little less XP per person because of it.

NEXTISH

- Comments on E&A #3
- ToEE Play Reports & XP Tally
- IgTheme essay

The Phoenix Nest

A zine for EVER & ANON 3 by Michael Cule
Of 3 Barratt Place, Easton Street, High Wycombe, Bucks. HP11 1XS.
UK. **Copyright 2025 © Michael Cule**
E-mail: Michael.Cule@gmail.com
Phone 01494 535878
Mobile 07816101942
Hear me & Roger BW pontificate on RPGs and other world shaking topics:
http://tekeli.li/podcast/
Read my Blog why don't you?:
https://room3b.blog/

STILL MORE EVIDENCE OF MY GENIUS

I have, for some time, had the ambition of creating a city.

This probably comes about from my admiration for Glorantha mostly, specifically Pavis, though HARN probably had an influence and Moorcock's Tanelorn went into the mix. I never thought I could create something as detailed and fantastic as GORMENGHAST.[1]

I've never got to anything publishable but I've had two serious efforts the second of which was the setting for a couple of campaigns I ran, one with FATE and one with GURPS.

The setting that never got to the table was a city in the caldera of an extinct volcano. It had been in the past the capital of an Empire and the Imperial Palace still stood at the centre of the city. But the Empire was gone even if the Imperial Court still ruled the city.

The court was surrounded by the estates of the noble Clans, carefully preserved farmlands full of prickly farmers standing on their ancient rights. They are only slightly less strange than the Imperial Court.

Around the rim of the crater were the various Wards of the city two of them (Patience and Reliance Wards) in perpetual shadow, up against the highest part of the Walls.

There are about a dozen Wards each with their particular styles and peculiarities and you can look down on them at the High Gate, the end of the land route into the city which winds up the side of the volcano by a narrow twisting road which is quite impractical for any sort of military assault. At the opposite end of the circle is the Port where most trade and traffic comes in and out.

[1] THE PLAIN PEOPLE OF A&E: That's a castle! ME: Hush! It's a setting!

Big, ancient, mysterious city with lots of detail yet to be filled in. You get the idea. I never gave it a name just an epithet: " the World Inside The Walls"

I did give the other project a name: Aegis. Which is the name of Zeus's shield and analogically means 'Protection'. I'm not really happy with that since it entangles a whole cultural mythology in a setting that doesn't have those particular stories but I never came up with anything better.

The backstory of Aegis, the City (which the players in my GURPS version got to see part of) was that the entire world was overwhelmed by a creeping threat that turned it into a wasteland of grey, all consuming dust. It was thought to be caused by a malevolent, sentient world-eater but even that is not known.

Eventually only the divine centre of the city was left. It's not clear if other gods owned the Fane (as the central temple was called) before the destruction of the world but it was the Six (see previous celebration of my creativity) who stopped the consumption of the world by founding the City and putting up the first Wall, a ring about the Fane with gates (or rather Gates) to the North, South, East and West. [2]

Starting with the small remnant of people who survived the destruction of the original world, the Six sent out missions to other universes and other times, snatching up the survivors of disaster, genocide and Armageddon. Uncle also recruited people who had just died but hadn't gone on to where the gods (if any) of their own world would send them and who had useful skill sets and recruited them to be Heroes.

As the immigrant population grew, the City expanded doubling its circumference[3] each time and also doubling the number of gates in and out. The times of Expansion were always a time of disturbance and disruption in the City with people who were privileged or even just comfortable the way things were not willing to trust the word of the Six Gods that this was needed and would eventually lead to the whole world being renewed. [4]

By the time I got to the 'present day' of the setting, after the Eighth Expansion, there were A Thousand Gates or actually K Gates (1024) because of the doubling effect. The core of the city was surrounded by the Estates of the Farmers and Nobles and the curving roads which started out as the boundary Roads by the Walls defined the Districts and Quarters.

The Six were not the only Gods in the City (though they were the only Gods *of* the City): a whole district was dedicated to the Gods people had brought with them and the priests were sometimes a little too keen on theirs being the Only True God.

There was no single ruler of the city: there was a bureaucracy the Board Of Regents, which held the powers accumulated by the Kings before they were got rid of. The Regents were elected by the Clans and the Tribes, the Great and the Good and were too dull to be oppressive.

There were tribes of talking cats, of humanoid robots (the victims of a lot of prejudice) of just about anything the players wanted to include. There was a university for Magicians one of whose Chancellors attempted an act of genocide by zombie dinosaur, the fiend!

I used the setting for a TV series pilot and then tried turning it into a novel. I revived it some time later as a wild and wooly FATE game for Wednesday night group and later as a slightly less wild and wooly GURPS game for the Monday night group. I was never entirely

[2] Oxford comma? Pah! TPPoE&A: Steady now, steady!

[3] Or was it doubling its area? I have notes working it out both ways.

[4] I promise you the political propaganda was less burning when I started to write this setting.

satisfied with it: I don't think I made it feel real. Having no particular world to root itself in the details were always somewhat vague. Perhaps one day I will go for it again but not just now.

So, is this a good IgTheme? City Building for Fun and Adventure: what do you need and where do you start? Obviously I started with the overall shape of the City:there may be better ways.

THE WAY OF THE WORLD

My seventy-first (ye gods!) birthday, was pleasant if hot. My brother took me out to a very nice restaurant in Marlow, pointing out as we drove there, the school he attended (I knew about that) and the pubs at which one started and finished the canonical Marlow pub crawl which I hadn't known. He told the story of waking up in the Marlow Rowing Club Boat House the morning after doing the crawl. I hadn't known about that either.

Another gift from my brother and sister in law was an air conditioner which I may figure out how to rig up in my tiny flat sometime before next summer.

Amongst the things I read this month were WHEN THE CLOCK BROKE by John Ganz: an interesting account of the roots of the rise of right wing movements in the US going back to the 1960s, taking in such notables as David Duke, Ross Perot and less publicly known movers behind the scenes. A lot of what is happening now was prepared for and planned then. It reminded me of those times and showed me how little attention I was paying back then.

To CONTINUUM the latest of the Glorantha and LARP obsessed conventions descended from the Leicester based CONVULSIONs in the 90s. They had moved to Cranfield University's Management Training Centre which was rather more luxurious than anything they had before if rather far away from anywhere else and notably more expensive. Still I had fun, doing 3 LARPS (two medical based, one of them horror one of them crime, and one intrigue based one) and a whole bunch of Tabletop RPGs mostly Glorantha based. I think I will go back next year, though I think I've identified the stress of travelling with a full and heavy suitcase on public transport as the primary source on my discomfort during my stay

CUNNING PLANS AND OVER-REACHING AMBITIONS

My Monday night group remains in abeyance. Hartley reports some improvement but also a few relapses. We keep checking with him.

The most recent session of the Mongoose Traveller 2300 campaign run by Roger went by fast when I realised the nature of the alien we had made first contact with, something we were told the last group through this campaign took six sessions to twig. I'm not entirely sure if Roger was complementing me or complaining.

Wednesday nights continue to feature the adventures of a very detached squad of Lunar soldiers on a jolly to the capital city of the Empire to receive medals and meet the Emperor.

Starring Alan as ESHAN, a Seven Mothers worshipping Nobleman with a lot of social skills. Tasked by their CO with keeping the group from embarrassing themselves, the Legion or the Empire.

Graham as VOSTOR a worshipper of the Lunar war god Yanafal Tarnils with a dark secret.

Drak as JARATHIR another YT initiate with a Big Sword.

Martin as SANDENE[5], a scout/sniper because some people have to be different. But still worships YT. But not as different as…

[5] The Plain People of E&A: Who is female. ME: Yes, yes. TPPoE&A: Which you keep forgetting… ME: Yes, I *know* TPPoE&A: Martin's drawn boobs on the character standee and you still… ME: Gah! TOOoE&A: And she never sleeps because of a gift from her God. You forgot about that too.

Pum as KEANUS another heavy infantryman who worships Humakt just to prove the tolerance of the Red Goddess.

This session wasn't recorded properly so I am reconstructing it from memory and my notes.

The night after their arrival and after settling down in temporary accommodation they awoke to the sound of the people in the next apartment having an argument and then Vostor's valet Vishi[6] and Sandene (who doesn't need sleep) coming in with red lentil porridge (made with their share of the Food Dole) and pastries and bread (made in the baker's shop on the ground floor).

Vishi was full of gossip from the printed Newspapers on display near the market, a service he provided every morning no matter how indifferently his betters received the rumours and proclamations.

He also passed on the information that today being Dark of the Moon all Temples, Museums and Public Baths would be closed.

Then arrived, Ureus the Valued, the trollkin rent collector and manager of the insula and other properties for their landlord the Senator. He wanted to check they knew the terms of their lease, how much it would cost if they chose to extend their stay and other such trivia. He then recommended that if they wanted more than the bare floor boards and bunk beds provided they should seek out the second hand furniture dealer in apartment IV/2 [7]on the far side of the floor, on the opposite side of the balcony around the central well of the building.

He then handed Eshan, their officer, a letter sealed with wax and written in a feminine hand, bowed and left.

Eshan opened it, read it, blushed and told the rest of them not to get into deep trouble while he was away, put on his best tunic and cloak and departed. In search of a barber, which he would also have found on the ground floor. (Alan was away this week.)

The chap selling second hand furniture from across the balcony turned out to be the same fellow Vostor had handed a package over to after some fiddling about with code phrases the night before. He seemed displeased to find that Vostor had taken up residence in the same insula he lived in and asked how long they were likely to be staying in a pointed way.

The next thing was Vishi pointing out the bloodstains he had found when cleaning the apartment, the word scratched in the floor[8] and the further bloodstains they found on the furniture they had bought from the dealer across the way. Oh and on the key to the room.

The follow up for that might have gone more smoothly if Keanus hadn't had a rush of brains to the head and decided to cast a Detect Undead spell from as near to the centre of the insula as he could manage.

And this was the moment for me to make a tricky decision and wonder if I should give them a short cut in the investigation. I too was unable to decide if I was impressed or irritated. But I decided that the thing they were (unknowingly) after was close enough to undead for Humakt, the God of Death, to regard it as one of his enemies.

Why yes, there was a positive trace from the spell. But significantly, it had taken two tries of Keanus to get the spell to work and the being that it found was resting in Apartment III/V on the floor below.

---

[6] THE PLAIN PEOPLE OF E&A: Try saying that three times in hurray. Vostor's valet Vishi…

[7] The details of Glamour are from the published version of A ROUGH GUIDE TO GLAMOUR and some of the NPCs are from the LIFE OF MOONSON LARP that it was written for. The Insula is from the fan published work CITIZENS OF THE LUNAR EMPIRE.

[8] Which was RACHE naturally. I had an explanation for it but they never followed it up nor mentioned it to the Big Official Police Officer who came round eventually, whose nickname it was.

There was a scramble of grabbing weapons and getting down the stairs and then a kicking down of a door. But by the time they got there the person who had been quietly resting a moment ago having heard the first spell casting had

Ripped up the floorboards in the bedroom and gone down into the empty apartment II/4

Opened the windows onto the street below and jumped about ten metres down to the street level.

And started to run and loose themselves in the city.

By the time Vostor got to street level, the only person he could find to stop and talk to him was the flower seller from the insula across the street who seemed not to have noticed someone jumping from the second floor though she had seen someone wearing a black cloak with a red lining (not exactly an uncommon fashion choice in the city) running off at speed down that street there. She couldn't even say if the person was male or female. She was more interested in flower arrangement than in Vostor's questions which annoyed him.

The Apartment where the whatever-it-was had been staying was dusty and showed little sign of habitation other than some disturbance in the dust around the one armchair and signs the bed had been slept in but not cleaned for a while.

They then reported these events to the Janatrix, the formidable elderly lady who kept the door and cleaned the common areas. She was very disturbed by the report of an undead something in her Insula. They were very impressed by the mementos and decorations from her military career on the walls of her apartment. She said that she had met the person staying in III/V several times… And then broke off as if something had just struck her. She said she would see to the repairs and cleanup and would report the events on to her superior.

So they went off around the city and did the tourist thing and the buy-useless-tat for relatives thing. It hasn't stuck in my memory and even Graham, astonished to be actually given a chance to go shopping in one of my games, couldn't come up with anything better than a "My Brother Went To Glamour And All I Got Was This Lousy T-Shirt" joke.

When they got back, their officer still hadn't turned up and there was a large coach and horses waiting outside. Waiting inside with the Janitrix was the Senator, Falerius Aggarius who sat them down and told them what he knew.

The last tenant in Apartment IV/4 before the soldiers was a gentleman called Drachemas. He was a pedlar in furs. And when his body had been found in the apartment, messily killed, the Senator had ordered the body disposed of and the apartment cleaned. "The last thing I wanted was the Grey Guards poking around my affairs. This may have been the wrong decision but we do not live in an ideal world. My rivals would have used the accident of a murder in this insula to cause me sorrow and win advantages in the ongoing Dart Wars."

A Dart War, for the uninitiated, is a political conflict among the high families of the Lunar Empire. Deniable violence, espionage, covert crimes are all tolerated if the common people and the peace of the Empire are not threatened.

And then there was the matter of the tenant in Apartment III/V. Strictly speaking the apartment was reserved for the Senator. But he had gifted it long term to Karasin the Icon Painter as a piece of aristocrat to artist patronage. "What I didn't know until today was that he had been sub-letting it on a weekly basis." He looked with wry disapproval at the Janitrix. She confessed that she had simply accepted the weekly rent from whoever had proffered it ("And they always did, without fail.") and not asked any questions until today. "And it was then that I realised something. I couldn't recall the faces, the names or even the genders of any of the people who turned up with the coin in their hands to pay for Three-Five. Not even the most recent one."

"Which is why, I am going to ask you to see what you can do to find out what has happened. Clearly this isn't a simple matter. Clearly, I have

to find out what is going on. But the considerations of politics still mean we have to be discreet. Can you give it a try?"

Of course they said 'yes' or rather 'yes if the Officer says it's OK.'

So they left it at that and went out to the street where the Senator's coach was waiting. Someone said "Ah look" and they saw The Officer coming up the south bound avenue[9]: he was arm in arm with the Senator's daughter Faleria.

Above them all shone the Red Moon, the Goddess of the Empire, half of her face dark and half red, as it always is at the heart of the Empire, in perfect balance between light and dark, life and death, order and chaos.

Behind and above them was a clear night sky with the stars clear and visible in their eternal glory.

Except, that at this moment, in defiance of all astrology and precedent, the constellation known as Orlanth's Ring appeared in the sky. Several days early. And shortly thereafter a brownish green cloud or some other flying phenomenon rose from the ground beneath the stars. It was far away, perhaps even as far as Dragon Pass from which they had journeyed.

And at that moment the Red Moon *flickered.* [10]

IGGY'S THEME: A MATTER OF STYLE

I dunno. I shall have to ask my players…

ME: What is my style of GMing?
DRAK: Didactic.
PUM: Two fingered? [11]

PUM: Theatre of the Mind.

DRAK: You tend to drive to a pre-destined narrative more than some people. This tends to tie in with your eschatological interests. You do like a good end of the world.
ME It makes the stakes high.

GRAHAM: You do like to make things difficult. Even when you should say 'just let them win, damn them.
ME: You don't know how many times I do say that.

I think I have to plead guilty to all of that, except the two fingered bit.

My parents were both teachers and I suspect that my ability to improvise around the disclosure of information is derived from theirs. I also like to drop in bits of extra information about the background and assumptions of the worlds they visit into pauses in the conversation.

Theatre of The Mind is my default mode of operating but with a system like RQ (and GURPS for that matter) I will dip into the support that it gives for old-fashioned, hex-paper-and-miniatures Tabletop play because it can make my life easier and make the situation feel more real to the players. My increasing dotage does make this more difficult for me.

I do like to have a place to aim for even if I know they can go off in other directions. I like knowing What Is Going On right from the start even if I can twist it around later on when a better idea occurs for me or to the players.

I really must try running BRINDLEWOOD BAY at some point just to see if I can walk in with no idea and walk out with a plausible solution at the end.

---

[9] In all fairness it is probable that no such vista exists in Official Glorantha as I describe here but I bent the cosmos to the needs of my story. Do not attempt this at home.

[10] There is a description of the events of that night in the Solar Gods book in the section on astronomy which this description may not be consistent with. I would ask for a further offence of Bending Reality Without A Licence to be taken into consideration.

[11] No: it's from the Greek word for 'teacher'. *didaktikos*,

I do like the stakes to be really important. I don't always trust my players to take an interest in what I've prepared without clearly understood reasons for them to care. I have myself all to often found myself in investigative scenarios where I find it difficult to give a damn about the crime.

I do make things difficult for them. This is because the assumptions in their heads about how easy things are going to be are ridiculously cinematic and optimistic, especially in Graham's head. As you will see above I allowed the plot in this week's write up to skip over a lot of the careful leg work that would otherwise be needed to get them to the point of knowing the two mysteries they would need to solve by the use of one spell that the character was casting as a routine precaution. But I decided not to allow them to surprise the lurker in Apartment III/5 nor to chase them along the street and capture them before any of the rest of the story had occurred. There is a balance and as referee I reserve the right to take action to ensure my story doesn't get burned through in the first twenty minutes.

COMMENTARIAT ON E&A 2

JOHN REDDEN: My deepest sympathies for your poor toe. // **RYCT Me:** (*Shocked)* Devious? Moi?

BRIAN ROGERS: I really like the idea of the game group meeting in a library having a campaign frame centred on a library. I like the look of 13th AGE's setting but the game system goes too far from my normal preferences. Laziness prevents me adapting it. Re Sir Kai: A corgi for the badge of the House of Windsor? *lèse-majesté* if ever I saw it.

MYLES COCORAN: After playing it once at STABCON I too have fallen to the temptations of FLIP 7. The fact that it is a speedy game makes it being a push-your-luck game less obnoxious. // Regarding player vs character names. I try to re-introduce who is playing who at the start of each write up. (At the table I am more likely to just forget character names. Sometimes I forget player names which is really embarrassing.) I also use an italic font for comments that are by the player and out of character. If that becomes unclear I don't know what I can do to improve it. // RYCT Me: The backstory of the Vargr made their familiarity to human players work. The Aslan were not part of the Terran diaspora from the Ancient period but they were unashamedly, two legged lion-people. It was only later that they started to get some more alien traits like the sexual dimorphism that made their males a menace and their females the ones with practical personalities.

GEORGE PHILLIES: I would love to be able to create a magical school/university story that didn't drain the magic out of the magic but still gave the players a sense of great potential and great risk. My basic idea was that magicians would have to create their own paths for magic through which they would weave spells. But it would take a group of players who care about that sort of thing as much as I do and not people who find that sort of secondary creation tedious and the idea of actually thinking about metaphysics abhorrent.

MARK NEMETH: Re: Cooperators or Adversaries? // According to one of my players, (see above) I try too hard to make things difficult for my players. I do have an admiration for clever use of things that they have at their disposal that I haven't noticed. I have slightly less admiration for them telling me that I'm being unfair and that there must be a witness to the strange event that happened here a few moments ago. *(GRAHAM: Look, someone just jumped out of a second floor window onto a crowded street. Someone must have seen something!)* Or that they should be able to find a Phoenix Cloak (or whatever it is they need) just when they need this. (Games with stats like NIGHT'S BLACK AGENT's Preparedness give me fewer grounds to complain). // Re The Gor Novels. Norman's writing is competent though he has some strange quirks (his peculiar use of the word 'modality' sticks in my memory) and indeed his sexual interests don't emerge too much into the foreground in the first few novels. IIRC it is in ASSASIN OF GOR that we get a sudden flip in Tarl Cabot's character from a

slightly chivalrous immigrant from Earth to an enthusiastic believer in the One True Way of male domination. If ASSASIN proves too much for your taste I wouldn't recommend going much beyond that.

PUM: RYCT Me: I have no idea where the copies of TROLLCRUSHER are that I stored away some decades ago. I remember searching for them to no effect some time ago. If I ever stumble across them I'll try to remember you interest. I should probably mention that I came across some scans of TROLLCRUSHER on line but the quality was less than stellar.

PATRICK ZOCH: I too love a good map and I rejoice that I live in a time where good maps are so easily available. I have very little artistic talent but the tools available on line put something acceptable and capable of making the world more real to the players. // And I too have used Orford as the model for a medieval setting, in my case an ARS MAGICA covenant. I visited Orford a few years later and it was a lot smaller than my imagination had depicted it.

JIM ECKMAN: RYCT Me: STARMAN JONES was one of the early influences moving me towards reading SF and F: I think I got my copy of the Puffin paperback from the 'book club' that the school encouraged to get us into the habit of being book buyers and readers.[12]. It has a lot of the virtues of Heinlein's writing and few of the vices and the picture of the socially stratified society was a fascinating one. (And typically radical as the early Heinlein often was.) The arcane rituals of a team of calculators putting together what would have been handled by machines only a little later than the publication date made it a strange non-predictive piece of SF.

CLARK TIMMINS: Dadaist DnD is a bit too advanced for me. Looking at the maps, devoid of their context made me wonder how many ways there are to create a hole in the ground that the players can crawl through and how to endow it with a simulacrum of verisimilitude. I admire (from a distance) the method in HOW TO HOST A DUNGEON of creating the prehistory of the site starting with the primordial history of the site and passing through it being occupied by a variety of tenants, differing in species, philosophy and skill.

And on the other hand you could equally well ask 'what do I want the site of the final battle to look like' or 'how do I want it to appear on the surface' or both as jump off points.

JOSHUA KRONEGOLD: RYCT On Dragons and Virgins. Clearly a blind taste testing is needed and a suitable range of draconic pallets. Perhaps America's Test Kitchen could stage it if they don't want to be bombarded with fire from the air.

LISA PADOL: RYCT Me: I think you can use prequel scenes to show off any sort of mechanic that is important to the game and that players may be unfamiliar with. You can also do one scene per character and show off that character's special abilities when it going wrong isn't going to ruin anything. You might even want to familiarise a player more used to a detailed, tactical combat system with a narrativist hand-wavy combat system.

BRIAN CHRISTOPHER MISIASZEK: RYCT Me: The rules of clerihews are few and elastic. But not *that* few and elastic. Lemme see:

J. Michael Cule
Was nobody's fool
At E&A Transition
Overboard went tradition.

JIM VASSILIAKOS: Re My Zine Title: Oh, yes. So I am informed. Also the title of anthology of poetry published in 1583, the name of a cottage for hire in Skegness and a company providing costumes for furries. Amazing what a quick Google can produce.

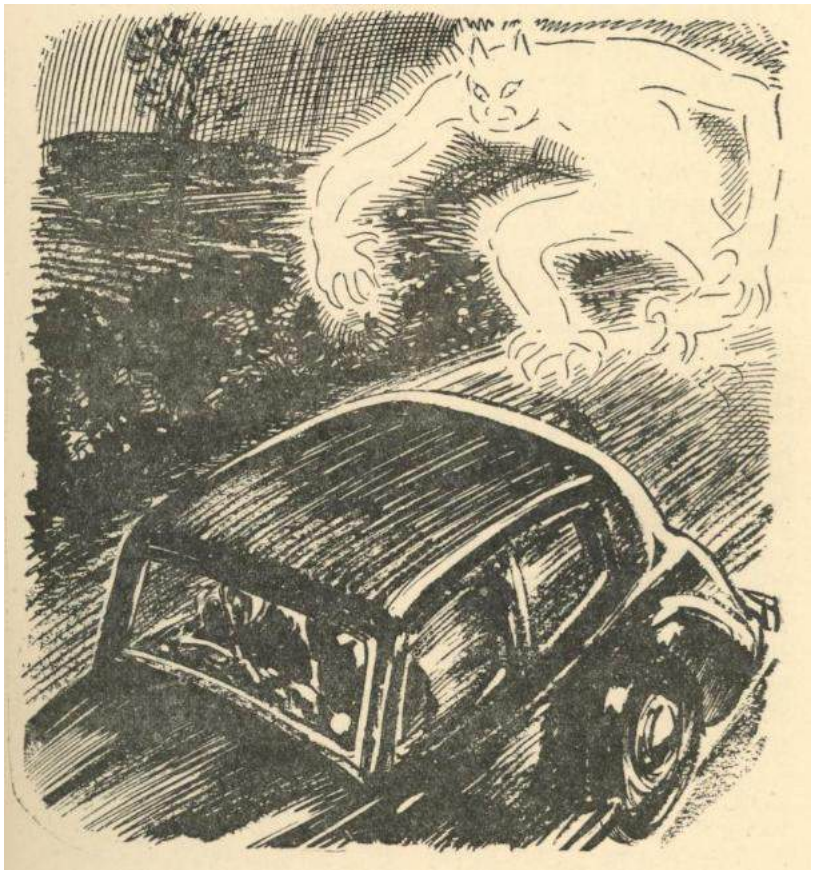
[12] I wonder if that sort of thing still happens.

AU REVIOR FOR NOW, MES AMIS AND DON'T ALLOW UNQUALIFIED PERSONS TO IMMANATIZE YOUR ESCHCATON

Four Things

Archive.org has a treasure trove of old pulp magazines, some dating back to the 1890s. They cover every genre of writing, including fantasy and science fiction. This 'zine presents four things, or creatures, derived from those old magazines. These creatures have the common thread of being named – in the story – as "things" and appearing decades before role-playing games were invented (1929 – 1941). The thing is focused on during the entire story or during a significant portion of longer stories. The four include a thing made entirely of fire, a thing that rolls around like a ball, an invisible thing that strangles people, and a weird alien thing that enjoys tormenting living creatures. This 'zine presents these four things in a brief description with a conversion for 5th Edition play. They've been forgotten for too long. It's time they started mangling characters.

"Fiery Thing"



William J. Elliott published "Doctor Doom, Ghost Detective", in *The Weird Story Magazine* (pub. Gerald G. Swan) No. 1, August 1940. The story is lengthy; there are many scenes and events in the story, one of which involves a couple being attacked by a fiery creature called only "the thing".

Fiery Thing is described (and illustrated) as a large humanoid monster with a body of fire and sparks. Its height is given as about seven or eight feet, it has shorter, twisted legs and tremendously long, prehensile arms that hang almost to the ground. These are attached to a "nebulous-looking" body atop which sits a small,

globular head. The only described facial features include “pointed” ears and eyes that are slits of flaming yellow. The gigantic and grotesque figure appears as if it were composed of “red-hot metal” (it’s unclear whether it is tangible) with sparks playing around it and flying off it. It radiates considerable heat at some distance, burning nearby vegetation. It is said to move very rapidly by using “leaps”. In the story, the victims drive away at nearly 70 miles per hour, and the creature has no difficulty in overtaking them - "The Thing was coming along the road in pursuit of them at an incredible speed and in a series of leaps” (p. 21). In the story, its only motivation appears to be burning objects and creatures – especially creatures that run away.

A movement speed of over 70 miles per hour is a difficult statistic to model in the 5th Edition rules. The fastest moving being in the game – at least that I’m aware of – is the Solar, with a flying speed of 150 Ft. per turn (about 17 miles per hour). The Quickling has a ground movement speed of 120 Ft. per turn. Fiery Thing would need a move of about 600 Ft. per turn to approximate a 70 miles per hour movement. This doesn’t seem rational given the rules. Instead, I have chosen to “stat” Fiery Thing’s prodigious movement with the “Fiery Pursuit” reaction and give it a move of 60 Ft. per turn, in line with various other similar, rapid monsters.

FIERY THING

Large Elemental, Neutral Evil

Armor Class 13 (Natural Armor)
Hit Points 93 (11d10 + 33)
Speed 60 ft

Str	Dex	Con	Int	Wis	Cha
10 (+0, +0)	18 (+4, +4)	16 (+3, +3)	6 (-2, -2)	10 (+0, +0)	7 (-2, -2)

Resistances Bludgeoning, Piercing, Slashing
Immunities Fire, Poison; Exhaustion, Grappled, Paralyzed, Petrified, Poisoned, Prone, Restrained, Unconscious
Senses Darkvision 60 ft.; Passive Perception 10
Languages Primordial (Ignan)
Challenge 6 (XP 2,300; PB +3)

Traits

Fiery Aura. At the end of each of Fiery Thing's turns, each creature in a 30-foot Emanation originating from Fiery Thing takes 5 (1d10) Fire damage. Creatures and flammable objects in the Emanation start burning.

Fiery Form. Fiery Thing can move through a space as narrow as 1 inch without expending extra movement to do so, and it can enter a creature's space and stop there. The first time it enters a creature's space on a turn, that creature takes 5 (1d10) Fire damage.

Fiery Illumination. Fiery Thing sheds Bright Light in a 30-foot radius and Dim Light for an additional 30 feet. This light winks out if Fiery Thing is killed.

Water Susceptibility. Fiery Thing takes 3 (1d6) Cold damage for every 5 feet Fiery Thing moves in water or for every gallon of water splashed on it.

Actions

Multiattack. Fiery Thing makes two Burn attacks.

Burn. Melee Attack Roll: +6, reach 10 ft. Hit: 10 (2d6+3) Fire damage. If the target is a creature or a flammable object, it starts burning.

Reactions

Fiery Pursuit. *Trigger*: Another creature Fiery Thing can see uses the Dash action. *Response*: Fiery Thing uses *Teleport* (self only, always *On Target*), but its destination space must be within 10 feet of the triggering creature.

"Rolling Thing"

Jack Williamson published "The Moon Era", a novelette, in *Tales of Wonder and Super-Science No. 15 - Autumn 1941*.

In Chapter VII ("The Trail Through the Thorns") and Chapter VIII ("The Eternal Ones"), the protagonist and his associate are chased and attacked by a peculiar lunar life-form referred to as "hostile things", "creature", and "the thing". It is described as a "crimson globe". The Rolling Thing is part of a group, or pack, of similar creatures. The protagonist uses a pistol to kill one, and it takes multiple shots before dying.

Rolling Thing is described as a five-foot diameter sphere covered in "individual scales of its shining armor, like plates of horn covered with ruby lacquer". It moves rapidly by rolling, caused by muscular contractions. Along its perimeter it has three "dark ovals" equally spaced. From each of these ovals it can extend two long black tentacles (six total), described as "a dozen feet long, slender, corrugated with innumerable wrinkles, and glistening with tiny drops of moisture" (p. 28). At the base of each tentacle, where it joins the sphere-shaped body, is "a single staring, black-lidded eye" and at the end of each tentacle is "a sharp, hooked claw, beside a black opening". The opening is a type of mouth – "the creature sucked its food through those hideous, retractable tentacles". The creature is said to "reek with an overpowering, fetid odour" and when it takes damage a "deep, angry drumming sound came from within it, a reverberating roar of astonishing volume". This roaring sound calls to other creatures which then congregate toward the sound. The tentacles can also be used for locomotion, but it is much slower than rolling – it can drag or lift itself with the "long, muscular tentacles".

As they are being pursued, the protagonist's companion (another peculiar lunar life form) says "They are implacable…When one of them sets out upon the trail of some luckless creature, it never stops until it has sucked the body fluids from it". After shooting the original creature to death, the protagonist escapes from many similar, converging creatures by climbing on top of a tall, steep rock that the creatures have difficulty climbing. His companion comments the Rolling Thing is immune to her "vital force" – which I have interpreted as a type of psychic energy. The protagonist holds them off with his pistol for twenty-four hours, when members of yet another lunar life form show up and things take a turn for the worse.

Much of the action takes place in a thick forest of moon thorns that would normally be impossible to move through. However, Rolling Things are impervious to punctures from the thorns and have battered their way through the forest of thorns, leaving well-used, six-foot diameter tunnels cleared of thorns. These tunnels run in razor-straight lines for long distances.

ROLLING THING

Medium Elemental, Neutral

Armor Class 18 (Natural Armor)
Hit Points 84 (8d8 + 48)
Speed 40 ft. (rolling), 10 ft. (climbing)

Str	Dex	Con	Int	Wis	Cha
20 (+5, +5)	8 (-1, -1)	22 (+6, +6)	5 (-3, -3)	10 (+0, +0)	5 (-3, -3)

Skills Perception +2
Vulnerabilities Thunder
Resistances Bludgeoning, Piercing
Immunities Psychic, Poison; Exhaustion, Grappled, Paralyzed, Petrified, Poisoned, Unconscious
Senses Darkvision 60 ft., Tremorsense 60 ft.; Passive Perception 13
Languages Primordial (Terran)
Challenge 5 (XP 1,800; PB +3)

TRAITS

Fetid Stench. *Constitution Saving Throw*: DC 10, any creature that starts its turn in a 5-foot Emanation originating from Rolling Thing. *Failure*: The target has the Poisoned condition until the start of its next turn. *Success*: The target is immune to this Rolling Thing's Stench for 24 hours.

Rolling Glide. Rolling Thing can roll (move) through nonmagical, light obstructions, without slowing down, by battering them aside or crushing them. While rolling (move), Rolling Thing ignores difficult terrain penalties.

Rolling Slam. While moving (rolling in a straight line), Rolling Thing can pass through Medium or smaller creatures' space(s). The target(s) must make a Dexterity saving throw (DC 15). *Failure*: Target takes 14 (2d8 + 5) Bludgeoning damage and receives the Prone condition. *Success*: Target takes 9 (d8 + 5) Bludgeoning damage and is moved one space to either side; if the Target cannot move, it automatically fails the saving throw.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Rolling Thing makes three attacks, using *Tentacle Slash* or *Exsanguinate* in any combination.

Tentacle Slash. *Melee Attack Roll*: +8, reach 15 ft. *Hit*: 12 (2d6 + 5) Slashing damage. The target must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or gain the Poisoned condition. While Poisoned, the target is unable to regain hit points.

Exsanguinate. *Exsanguinate* can only be used against a target that has the Poisoned condition. *Melee Attack Roll*: +8, reach 15 ft. *Hit*: 15 (3d6 + 5) Necrotic damage and the target gains the Grappled condition. Rolling Thing regains hit points equal to half of the damage inflicted by *Exsanguinate*.

"Strangling Thing"

Mark Schorer published "A Bottle from Corezzi", in *Strange Stories Vol. 2, No. 3 - December 1939*.

The story features a creature (referred to as "Thing" and "strangler", p. 36) that is never seen because it is permanently invisible. In the story, Strangling Thing is imprisoned inside of a finely crafted wine bottle. It is insinuated that Strangling Thing was conjured and then imprisoned. When the bottle later is opened, Strangling Thing escapes and strangles the character that opened the bottle. Once freed, Strangling Thing doesn't move very much until it is dispelled, whereupon it leaves by an open window though the inference is that it escapes to "space".

In the story, servants peeping through a keyhole see the character struggling and being strangled, but say "we saw him struggling with nothing, flailing the air" (p. 35). When the corpse is examined, hand marks are observed around the neck with the comment "What small fingers the strangler had" (p. 36).

STRANGLING THING

Small Fiend (Devil), Lawful Evil

Armor Class 15 (Natural Armor)
Hit Points 110 (13d8 + 52)

Speed Fly 60 ft. (hover)

Str	Dex	Con	Int	Wis	Cha
17 (+3, +3)	17 (+3, +6)	18 (+4, +4)	12 (+1, +1)	14 (+2, +5)	15 (+2, +5)

Skills Perception +10
Resistances Acid, Bludgeoning, Cold, Lighting, Piercing, Slashing, Thunder
Immunities Fire, Poison, Psychic; Charmed, Deafened, Exhaustion, Frightened, Grappled, Paralyzed, Petrified, Poisoned, Prone, Restrained, Unconscious
Senses Blindsight 60 ft.; Passive Perception 15
Languages Infernal
Challenge 6 (XP 2,300; PB +3)

TRAITS

Amorphous. Strangling Thing can move through a space as narrow as ½ inch without expending extra movement to do so.
Diabolical Restoration. If Strangling Thing dies outside the Nine Hells, it disappears, and it gains a new body instantly, reviving with all its Hit Points somewhere in the Nine Hells.
Invisibility. Strangling Thing has the Invisible condition.

ACTIONS

Strangle. *Melee Attack Roll*: +6, reach 5 ft. *Hit*: 10 (2d6 + 3) Bludgeoning damage. If the target is a Medium or smaller creature, Strangling Thing gives it the Grappled condition (escape DC 13). Until the grapple ends, the target has the Restrained condition, is Suffocating, and takes 10 (2d6 +3) Bludgeoning damage at the start of each of its turns. Strangling Thing can only strangle one creature at a time.

While grappling the target, Strangling Thing can't take this action, Strangling Thing halves the damage it takes (round down), and the target takes the same amount of damage.

REACTIONS

Strangling Surprise. *Trigger*: A creature opens an object that contains Strangling Thing. *Response*: Strangling Thing surprises the creature and uses ***Strangle*** as a Bonus action.

"The Thing from Outside"

George Allen England published "The Thing from – 'Outside'", in *Amazing Stories Vol. 1, No. 1 - April 1926*.

The story features a creature (referred to as "a thing from outside", p. 68) that is never seen or described, probably because it is permanently invisible. It does leave very distinctive tracks, however ("only a ring about four inches in diameter, a kind of cup-shaped depression with a raised center.", p. 68). The tracks appear as smallish holes in whatever they touch to a depth of a few inches. The holes are exceptionally cold – water poured into the holes instantly freezes solid and remains frozen for an extended period. The tracks are always evenly spaced (two feet apart) and occur only in a single straightish line. This leads one of the characters to assume the creature itself is like a large, vertical disc with several legs extending outward something like spokes.

The creature, essentially, drives the characters insane through a variety of methods. The characters believe the creature is experimenting with them, like a scientist might experiment with insects. The "outside" referenced in the title indicates more than just deep space, as the characters believe the creature must be from some type of parallel reality. In the standard 5th Edition cosmos, the creature would have an origin in the Far Realm.

In the story, the creature kills a few characters outright (one by one) but seems to prefer tormenting the characters to killing them. This leads the remaining characters on a fearful attempt at cross-country escape while they gradually go insane. The creature is in no hurry and comes and goes over several days. The story also reveals that the characters have remarkably different experiences from each other, probably due to hallucinations and/or distorted memories. The characters never attempt to catch or attack the creature – they just try to flee from it, which is more-or-less unsuccessful until the creature apparently becomes bored of tormenting them.

THE THING FROM 'OUTSIDE'

Medium Aberration, Neutral Evil

Armor Class 17 (Natural Armor)
Hit Points 150 (20d10 + 40)
Speed 30 ft

Str	Dex	Con	Int	Wis	Cha
10 (+0, +4)	9 (-1, +3)	15 (+2, +6)	18 (+4, +8)	15 (+2, +6)	18 (+4, +4)

Skills Perception +10, Stealth +7
Resistances Bludgeoning, Piercing, Slashing
Immunities Poison; Exhaustion, Grappled, Paralyzed, Petrified, Poisoned, Prone, Restrained, Unconscious
Senses Darkvision 120 ft.; Passive Perception 20
Languages Telepathy 120 ft.
Challenge 10 (XP 5,900; PB +4)

TRAITS

Disintegrating Step. The Thing from Outside leaves distinctive footprints. They look like rounded, cup-shaped depressions of missing substance (rock, iron, wood, mud, whatever) evenly spaced two feet apart and occurring in a single line. The depressions are freezing cold – enough instantly to freeze solid water poured into them for a considerable amount of time. The creature does not intentionally use this ability in combat.

Invisibility. The Thing from Outside has the Invisible condition.

ACTIONS

Corrupt Mind (2/Day). *Wisdom Saving Throw*: DC 16, one creature The Thing from Outside can see within 30 feet. *Failure*: The target takes 15 (3d6 + 5) Psychic damage and is cursed for 24 hours or until The Thing from Outside dies. Until the curse ends, the target cannot use Concentration, gains no benefit from finishing Short or Long Rests, and exhibits strange behavior and experiences disturbing hallucinations. *Success*: The target takes 15 (3d6 + 5) Psychic damage and gains no benefit from finishing Short Rests.

***Dominate Mind* (2/*Day*)**. *Wisdom Saving Throw*: DC 16, one creature The Thing from Outside can see within 30 feet. *Failure*: The target has the Charmed condition until The Thing from Outside dies or is on a different plane of existence from the target. While Charmed, the target acts as an ally to The Thing from Outside and is under its control while within 60 feet of it. In addition, The Thing from Outside and the target can communicate telepathically with each other over any distance.

The target repeats the save whenever it takes damage as well as after every 24 hours it spends at least 1 mile away from The Thing from Outside, ending the effect on itself on a success.

Spellcasting. The Thing from Outside casts one of the following spells, requiring no Verbal or Material components and using Charisma as the spellcasting ability (spell save DC 15).

At Will: *Chill Touch, Modify Memory*
3**/Day Each**: *Confusion, Mind Spike*
2/Day Each: *Etherealness, Fear*
1/Day: *Plane Shift (Self Only)*

– Clark B. Timmins
Four Things

A Rhodomontadulous Promenade #3

George Phillies
phillies@4liberty.net
48 Hancock Hill Drive
Worcester MA 01609

A Short D&D Discussion

If you have not yet seen it, I call your attention to https://batintheattic.blogspot.com/2025/07/rulings-not-rules-foundation-not.html which discusses the profound difference between the original D&D books, in which the gamesmaster rules on what happens, and the later books, in which you the books tell you what happens.

The original rules encouraged creativity and improvisation. We consider the party that entered a dungeon, fifty years ago. It seemed to go downhill a lot, but the challenges were modest. Finally the reached an area where the cavern top far above them glowed like a full moon behind clouds. The cavern opened into a huge chamber. Fairly close, the chamber was crossed by a river. A boatman could be seen playing his trade, with a long line of people entering his skiff. A clink of coins revealed his tariff: Two copper pennies for each person crossing. Curiously, no matter how many people boarded, his skiff seemed to have more than adequate space. The party's path led down through a narrow stretch, and at a hairpin they found themselves pinned against the outside of the hairpin by a large dog. A very large dog. A dog with three heads. As I said, they had gone down a fair distance. The fellow running an elf whispered a few words to the gamesmaster, who agreed with something.

"I'm an elf. I get a split move with the attack in the middle," he announced. "I will split move, and tickle the dog under its chins." After several repeats, he scratched behind its ears, all six of them. At some point the dog rolled on its back, wagging its tail and making doggish sounds of great approval. The party then fed the dog, at which point the dog adopted the party and followed it everywhere. That is improvisation.

I give a second example, involving our characters, below. The characters are all friends. Most are members of an informal 'fourth born and little future' club. Herman Engolph has persuaded them to form a mercenary company to perform legal deeds for pay, incidentally getting some of them out of town before events catch up with them. They will assemble in one of the town meeting hall's private rooms to listen to an offer from a merchant caravan. Ordinarily the merchant would have a few guards, this being well inside the civilized world, but his cargo is somewhat valuable, and there are odd rumors of strange events along his normal route. The seven adventurers are all from respectable families, so they are reasonably assumed to be trustworthy, but none of them have had significant practical experience, so the merchant's offer, presented in advance, is fairly modest. Now they will hear the formal offer. And now I show some rule improvisation

Sandra made her way around tables toward Engolph's private room. The public room is unusually full; from their dress, several minor lords and their senior retainers are returning from the Capital Conclave and have stopped for lunch. She is taken entirely by surprise when someone grabs her from behind by the waist and chest.

The grabber says "How much for a tumble, my pretty? Your phony armor doesn't fool me." The stench of too much hard cider is strong on his breath.

“Unhand me!” She decides the room was too noisy for her to hear his approach.

“Oh, no, the stables have a hayloft!”

We have now reached combat. He is the lordling of a minor estate in the western marches, accustomed to having his way with serving wenches, not quite cognizant that he is now in a civilized land. She is aware that this is the town’s trade hall, not a tavern for fools and drunks. The gamesmaster tells them each to roll 3D6 (an abbreviation due to, among other people, one of the two collators of The Wild Hunt, a man now deceased.) The lordling has strength 7. He rolls an 11, missing by 4. His combat practice is mostly in the bedroom. She has strength, meaning martial ability, 17. She rolls a 9, succeeding by 8. Games master: He has surprise, but is dead drunk. He also thinks he is in amatory combat with a woman of negotiable virtue.

Sandra’s player announces.’Left arm reaches up and grabs his hair, right arm reaches directly back and grabs his belt. I twist and lift to break his grip.”

Gamesmaster: You easily break his grip and lift him off the floor and to your side.

Sandra: I throw him at the support pillar in front of me.

Gamesmaster and you roll another 9. He hits the pillar hard and falls to the floor.

Lordling: How did I land?

Gamesmaster: You miss your dexterity roll – 14 against a 10 – and land flat.

Sandra: I step back. Fighting in town is highly discouraged, no matter that the civic flogger and the civic executioner will regret this chance to ply their trades.

Lordling, standing not yet straight, pulls a dagger, holding it point down: “You (impolite word referring to her assumed trade) (impolite word, though why he thinks she is a dog is unclear) I’ll carve your face off!” He charges, not quite crouching. (Well, the GM said he was drunk.)

Sandra “I need a dex roll to unshoulder my shield in time.”

GM: You miss by 1, but you stepped back. You had enough time.

Sandra: Parry with shield, against his dagger and his head butt.

GM: Parry? ‘OK, we need a rule for that. Roll it as an attack.’

Sandra: I seem to be stuck rolling 9s.

Lordling strikes with dagger. GM: You do 1 point of damage, on her shield. Sandra does 5 points of damage, canceling your attack, and 4 points on the top of your head.

GM: Sandra, surprise move, you did significant damage. You get initiative.

Sandra: I bonk him on the head again. I roll another 5.

Gamesmaster: His constitution was weak. He is now unconscious.

Sandra: I shoulder my shield.

Gamesmaster: Someone well-dressed stands in front of you. “Humble apologies for this sad event,” he says. “He seems to have gotten what he deserved. We are leaving town; he will leave tied to his horse. If you are injured, I will ask my Legalist to propose recompense.”

Sandra catches her breath. “No damage, so no compensation needed.”

“Allow me at least to clean your tabard where he touched it. Fool also had no table manners.”

Sandra nods politely. “Sir, you are most kind.”

He speaks the clothes-cleaning and repair chant. All damage and stain vanishes.

“The Town Guard will by and by appear. I will make peace with them, as he is not sober enough to appreciate the skill of the Civic Flogger.”

“I will be here if there are questions.”

End of combat event.

Our characters are:

Herman Engolph, Esq. is a Gentleman of Independent Means (local character class). His objective is to raise money to buy land, as Gentlemen gain from money, not from experience points.

Brother Gowophilus is a human cleric of Gow All-Fleeing, He who hides in his Invincible Fortress Beyond The Skies. He worries that he is becoming a heretic, because he is doing something that requires courage, while his faith’s chief virtue is cowardice “A hero dies once; a coward can die many times”.

Sister Jennifer is an elven cleric of the Corn Snake Goddess. There was a scandal for which she was falsely blamed, so she is leaving town. Quickly.

Vincent Goodheart is a budding human stone mage, a field of study rarely practiced locally. He annoyed his family by not taking orders in the clergy. He is looking for instruction elsewhere.

Emmanuel Lorne was an advancing human mage, until he proved that in a university defense that his preceptor’s pet proposed spells were physically impossible. He is now moving elsewhere.

Brian Northwindson is from a human family of men-at-arms whose generations each retired to the farm while they were young enough to be in one piece.

Sandra … skip her surname, which goes on forever … had early talent at magic, but preferred to develop her martial skills. She has the curly golden hair, bright blue eyes, and small rounded ears that

speak of elven ancestry; the troll part of the family tree only becoming apparent in combat.

I did roll for them. The dice were apparently affected by a Blandness spell

Name	Str	Int	Wis	Con	Dex	Char	$x2
HE-GIM	12	12	11	12	11	8	22
Gow-Cl	12	7	13	13	8	9	18
Jenn-Cl	9	10	13	12	11	8	26
Vince-M	10	10	12	14	10	14	26
Lorne-M	~~13~~ 9	~~16~~ 18	9	9	6	12	18
Brian - F	12	8	10	11	11	11	24
Sandra-F	~~15~~ 17	~~13~~ 9	9	8	10	11	26

Two of the players have used the redistribution rules as interpreted where I was, in-period, to improve their characters.

The five characters who can cast spells have chosen them. More or less all characters can use level zero housekeeping spells that ignite kindling for fires, clean clothing, and the like. The mages are also aware of non-combat spells that maintain a modern-for-them society. For example, Growth of Plants, cast on a large acreage of wheat fields, greatly increases the harvest some months later.

The Preparatory Tale, reminding the Gamesmaster of what is about to happen to the local society, continues.

Mariana Weaver carefully surveyed the lands around Morning Star Tower. The sun was sinking in a beautifully clear sky, but it was no more than early afternoon. Yesterday there had been dark smoke in the far distance, perhaps across the ducal border at a smallcrofter village. Towards noon there had been very peculiar sounds, very sharp like hammer blows, from someplace upriver. The Grand Master had assigned several additional acolytes to watch the tower and the gates, but gave no indication as to what was being looked for.

Now there was something, coming up the road toward the tower. Marianna cast the lightest of seeing spells, recognizing in the vastly enlarged image a line of smallcrofters, the one in the lead carrying the Great Oak Village banner. The smallcrofters following the banner were carrying stretchers and pushing their fellows in barrows. She cast the slightly stronger spell that let her see what was behind the trees. It was a great line of villagers, to her rough count most of the population of the village, and many of them were clearly wounded or grieviously hurt. They were followed by a group of people, much too tall to be smallcrofters, and strangely dressed.

She tapped one of the message crystals on the tower. “Eric,” she said, “something strange is coming up the road. It appears to be the small crofters from Great Oak Village, but many of them are hurt, and there are other people with them. Close and bar the gates from the forecourt to the midcourt. The forecourt gates should be open. Send one of the duty apprentices, preferably someone with medical and combat skills, down the road to greet the villagers and find out what is going on.”

Marianna reminded herself of that traditional tactic, creating a distraction while something

unfortunate was happening in some other direction. She walked briskly around the tower, saw nothing, cast a third-order detection spell that revealed nothing of any interest, and considered bothering the Grand Master. Bothering the Grand Master was generally understood by his acolytes to be inauspicious. Before she made her mind up, she felt a presence touching her mind. "Yes?" She asked.

"I felt a disturbance," the Grand Master said. "Is aught amiss?"

"There are a considerable number of villagers coming up the road toward the tower," she said. "At least some of them appear to be injured. They are followed by a group of strange men. I sent an apprentice to find out what was going on, had the midcourt gate closed, and then realized that these people could be a distraction, so I did a scan in all the other directions around the tower. I must most humbly and profoundly apologize for having disturbed you and am prepared to submit to flogging or such other punishment as you may dictate."

"Marianna," the Grand Master said, "this is not that terrible Academy from which you recently and wisely managed to get yourself expelled. They taught fine combat discipline, so you did exactly what you were supposed to do, exactly as I hoped you would. Also, I am not in the habit of punishing people. I try to teach you to do better. By and by, you will become comfortable with this situation. However, given the terrible Academy from which you escaped, complete with its quaint customs of beating, flogging, and torturing its students, and allowing them to do terrible things to each other, I realize this is going to take a while. In this case, you seem to have done the right things." The Grand Master's presence faded from her consciousness.

Down at ground level, Eric Anderson listened in dismay as his Apprentice reported from the roadway. Apprentice Quant was much older than many of the other students. He had seen combat, pirates, seadragons, and all manner of other terrible events. When Quant had heard what was coming up the road, he headed down the road if not at a run at least in a highly undignified fast walk. Eric decided that if a man of Quant's experience thought that dignity should be second to timeliness, he would respect Quant's judgment.

Quant reached the smallcrofters. "I count 25 seriously injured smallcrofters," Quant said through his speaking crystal, "and several of the strange people following are slightly or grievously wounded. At least seven of the smallcrofters are wounded unto death, as are two of the strange people. I am summoning healing spells as rapidly as I can without exhausting myself, and have perhaps staved off visits from the young lady of the dark lands, but many of the injuries are sword piercings and slices that are beyond my safe interventions. The strange people do not speak the *koine dialektos* or any of the other language that I know. I am embarrassed to report that my mastery of the gift of tongues still needs some work, because that didn't work either. They appear to be friendly. From all the smallcrofters trying to tell me at the same time what happened, the strange people are very heavily armed with weapons I don't recognize. I did try a detection of the art of casting; these people read at dead zero, which is at least unusual for people who are not some sort of undead. Allowing that you sent me out here because I have some idea what battlefield wounds look like and need for a cure, I count six great interventions, three dozen major interventions, and at least fifty substantial or minor healing spells. I am doing my best without exhausting myself, but I am not sure that I am not losing ground on some of the smallcrofters who are grieviously wounded. The two strange people, and I mean strange, their eyelids are different, and their skin is dark but not tanned, responded much more positively to my spellworkings and seem to be safe for the moment. By the way, some of the strange people are remarkably tall. The young lady who appears to be their commander is taller than I am."

Eric Anderson considered some intelligent response, such as tearing out his hair. What was going on out there? However, Great Oak village had made an exchange of benefits with the Grandmaster, so they were owed healing. "Quant, do the best you can under the circumstances. I will summon help to be waiting when you reach the forecourt gate." There were going to be a considerable number of acolytes more than a bit annoyed when he called them from their work, but there really was no choice. He tapped one of the speaking crystals on his podium.

Attacks of Opportunity

Issue Two, Dylan Capel

Playing

Questworlds

I ran a game of *Questworlds* this month for people unfamiliar with the system, indeed this was actually my first time playing this iteration of the system. The new book feels complex and overwhelming compared to a system that I thought of previously as relatively simple and light. The book now includes a number of different settings including sci-fi and superheroes and the rules have a number of optional variations all of which get worked examples inline in the text. This means the text is much longer (although hopefully very clear about the author's intent) on a page size that is smaller than the previous editions. Some of the language is a bit strangled when dealing with things like powers that are magical, supernatural or generally beyond the realm of normal human experience. Here the desire to be generic perhaps obfuscates more than intended.

I also made some mistakes in introducing the game to the players. By default the conflicts are not generally to the death like a lot of games, instead you have competing goals that generally don't require that the opponent be dead to be fulfilled. I didn't really make that clear so the players were confused about the amount of danger they were in but also at one point when a player did want to kill and rob some NPCs they were unclear on how to use the mechanics to escalate to that state and therefore perhaps felt the NPCs had plot armour.

I hadn't wanted to run a *Glorantha* game with the rules as I felt in a one-shot you can end up with *Glorantha* mega-fans (which I am not) or people who know nothing about the setting which can be a difficult mix. The advantage would have been that people familiar with the setting would have understood that you don't need to kill everyone in the nearby tribe to steal their cattle if what you're trying to do is have more cattle.

I was also only using the stripped down basic contests with not much in the way of augments and consequences and using rising difficulty. This meant there weren't loads of optional mechanics to assess each time but maybe felt a bit basic. I also rolled very poorly on the resistance rolls which resulted in the characters never really failing but instead having loads of negotiated draws which is not bad but perhaps confusing as an introduction as

resolution mechanics tend to be a bit more clear cut than having a series of compromise outcomes.

I learnt a lot from the experience which I wasn't expecting given that I have played the game a reasonable number of times before in different settings. The current edition of the rules feels definitive but I would love to have a light or cheat-sheet version of the rules for table use. This edition definitely feels like one for people who are already fans, I honestly don't know how I'd feel encountering such a dense text for the first time.

Pendragon

I had the opportunity to play through a starting scenario of the new Pendragon set, which has been interesting. The world feels quite dangerous and dark with a lot of battles and deaths happening both "off-screen" and in the spotlight. No player knight has been taken into the lord's bosom yet.

Despite having a few "famous" traits I do manage to whiff rolls in a way that can really pull you out of the immersion of the game, handling failure in an Athurian tale shouldn't really be problematic but the simulationist approach doesn't fit with the mythic storytelling of the source material.

Watching

I've started watching the *Foundation* series, not having read the books. It clearly had quite an influence on Traveller! I now have a much better idea of how the noble society could work in terms of the relationship between planetary authorities and hereditary royal families.

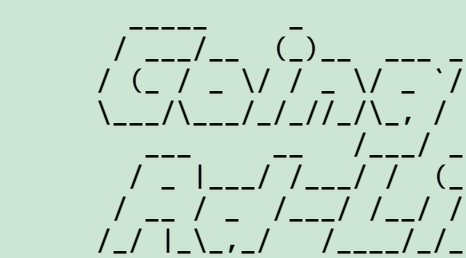
It is another work touching on the concept of immortality with the courtier robot being a fascinating witness, servant, partner and collaborator. The shifting balance of power between her (it?) and the emperor is intriguing.

I liked the focus on mathematics and the spark between Jared Harris and Lou Llobell in the first episode and have been disappointed to see that maybe that is not going to happen again.

I'm curious how the actors who play the Imperial clones approached having to convey their different characters as the generations pass.

Comments

Apologies for not having any direct comments yet, things are busy in normal life and I haven't had time to properly read and reflect yet. However it was great to see more former A&E's submitting zines. I continue to enjoy the campaign writeups.



a zine for ***Ever & Anon***
by **Avram Grumer** of **Brooklyn, NY**
CC BY-NC-ND 4.0
email: avram@grumer.org
see http://grumer.org/
for social media links
software: Affinity Publisher
font: IBM Plex Mono

Intro

Hi! I'm Avram Grumer, and I contributed to *Alarums & Excursions* sporadically from 1990 to 2003. I've been playing RPGs since I was a middle-schooler in the late 1970s, and I noticed some of my classmates playing around with some plastic Platonic solids and three brown booklets in a white box. After rolling up a character who got killed off in his first foray (by the other PCs, my own friends and classmates! O, the perfidy of youth!) I picked up a copy of the Holmes Basic Set for myself, and spent many an hour of class time doodling complicated dungeons on graph paper when I should have been memorizing Hebrew verb conjugations. (Most of which have gone unmemorized to this very day!)

It was around this time that I met Lisa Padol, who would later become another *A&E* contributor, introduced by our dads, who knew each other through work. We lived near each other, so we spent a lot of time together. (Our parents were probably hoping to spark a romance, but that didn't happen. Like those *D&D* dice, our relationship has been solid and Platonic.) I recall that she already had a copy of the *AD&D Monster Manual*, but the *Dungeon Master's Guide* hadn't been released yet, so that nails the time down to late 1978 or early '79.

In high school, my horizons broadened: *Traveller*, *Villains & Vigilantes*, *The Fantasy Trip*, and *Champions*, among others. That was also when I saw my first issue of *A&E* (#77, Jan 1982) on the magazine shelves at the Compleat Strategist in Manhattan. Took me another eight years to get around to contributing.

One APA led to others: *APA-NU* (NYC-area sci-fi fandom), *Thwack!* (comics), *Golden APA* (the Illuminatus! trilogy and related weirdness). *Golden APA* led to a web development job. The web-dev job led to blogging. Blogging led to anger, anger led to hate… No, wait. Blogging led to joining a group blog, Making Light, which sadly seems to have collapsed under the weight of its technical debt.

Social media has been consuming an unfortunate amount of my time lately, and while microblogging platforms like Bluesky and Mastodon (and the late, lamented Twitter, of which we will speak no more) are great for light socializing, short-form humor, and keeping abreast of current slang, I've been yearning for a place for long-form writing. I was considering getting back into *A&E*, when that abruptly stopped being an option, so here I am.

At some point I will probably get tired of this page layout and switch to something more modern.

Recent RPGing

As a GM, "recent" goes back two years, to the Spring of 2023, when Lisa ran a playtest of *Tiān Dēng*, a sci-fi game using the Powered by the Apocalypse mechanics, which is due to come out from Evil Hat at some point. Lisa ran the character-generation session, and then one adventure session, then appointed me the GM for the last session so that she'd have a chance to play, and we'd all get to see how the system ran with someone else running it. Sadly, this meant that my character, who hadn't gotten much screen time in the previous session, went under-utilized. But things went okay, I managed to fit an amount of story into a two-hour session that felt about like a 22-minute episode of *Cowboy BeBop*, which was what I'd been aiming for.

As a player, we've got a pretty stable regular group going. (Some of them are also involved in other games that I'm not in. There's a lot of LARPing, which I'm not interested in.) Lisa used to be the primary GM, but she's successfully foisted that position off onto Gaylord Tang, who's run *Masks*, *Call of Cthulhu*, and now we've just had a *Scum and Villainy* session zero.

Scum and Villainy

This is a Forged in the Dark game based around *Star Wars*, *Cowboy BeBop*, *Guardians of the Galaxy*, *Firefly*, and similar stories of small groups of colorful space-traveling characters living outside of, or at least on the fringes of, the law. Despite bringing along a small notebook for the specific purpose of taking notes, I forgot to take any.

Most of our time was spent deciding on a ship (which determines the primary focus of the campaign: The Stardancer is good for smugglers; the Cerberus for bounty hunters, and the Firedrake for rebels looking to fight the Hegemony. We went with the Stardancer), equipping it, and then making characters. My character, the Mechanic Harmony Qián, is basically my under-played *Tiān Dēng* character, tweaked a bit for the new setting. She's the daughter of a no-longer-wealthy noble family, who got into the Starsmiths Guild, then flunked out due to heterodox mystical beliefs.

I don't recall any of the other PCs' names, but I do recall that they all start with V. Lisa's playing a Mystic, Gareth a Muscle, and Josh a xeno Speaker. We worked through the opening scenario, so now we've got a weird alien artifact called the Aleph Key.

Harry Connolly, on Bluesky, described Forged in the Dark games as "for people who like making little bullet lists then filling in little boxes," and he wasn't wrong. (And I do like those things!) This is an extremely *procedural* system. There are mechanics for figuring out, between sessions, exactly how much trouble the PCs get into for what they did during the last session, and scaling up the next session's adversaries accordingly. There's a whole lot of session-zero setup, where you come up with backstory details and stuff, and it's all very specific, too, with lists of NPCs you can choose to be friends or enemies with.

So this is a game where you come out of character creation with a sense of accomplishment, but it'll take another few sessions before we know whether all that box-checking has paid off.

Masks: A New Generation

The title of this game confused me at first: Was it a second edition of some previous *Masks* game I hadn't heard of? Nope, the subtitle refers to the PCs, who are a new generation of teenage superheroes, trying to figure out their place in the world of superheroing.

Like most popular Powered by the Apocalypse games, *Masks* is tightly focused on a specific experience. It's not a general superhero game, it's a *teen coming-of-age* superhero game. The mechanics are built around that particular kind of story, specifically enough that someone who wanted to play teen super-*villains* instead felt they had to do a rewrite.

It's also not a game for the kind of player who cares a lot about deciding whether to put 10 Character Points into one more die of Flash or two more dice of Energy Blast. The actual nature of your PC's powers is almost entirely narrative chrome; most of the mechanics deal with the effects of your activities upon your character's story arc, and relationships with other characters.

Call of Cthulhu: Harlem Unbound

We're all familiar with *Call of Cthulhu*, right? Well, this is just what it says on the tin. I'm unusual in our group for finding the Basic RolePlaying mechanics unwieldy. A BRP character sheet is basically a long, depressing list of stuff my PC is bad at. Only modern versions of BRP have multiple success thresholds for each skill, so it's more like a depressing *spreadsheet* of stuff my PC is bad at.

This campaign provided me with a memorable gaming moment: We were playing over Zoom, and I had my window open to let in the spring breeze. One of my neighbors was practicing some brass wind instrument, which helped set the scene for Prohibition-era Harlem. I rolled the dice for some task or other, rolled a fumble, and just at that moment, my neighbor produced the "sad trombone" riff!

The campaign itself was fine. We managed to beat the bad guy! My PC lost lots of SAN, but didn't go irretrievably insane! I took lots of notes! Probably in too much detail!

An Infinity of Ships

This isn't a game, exactly. It's a sourcebook for any sci-fi game that requires lots of different kinds of spaceships. I backed the Kickstarter campaign a couple of years ago, and the goods finally turned up last month. There's a hardcover book (about 150 pages, 6×9 inches, or a little bigger than A5 if you use ISO paper sizes like a civilized person) full of random tables and cool color illustrations. And if you don't feel like carrying that around, there's also a deck of 115 *Instant Starships* cards with a subset of the book's tables. Also: Stickers, pin-up art (of starships, of course), and a couple of bookmarks with more tables on 'em! (I think some of these items were only for Kickstarter backers.)

Games I Haven't Played, But Have Opinions About Anyway

Mothership

Mothership, from Tuesday Knight Games is designed for *Alien*-style space horror, and has some really great graphic design. But I want to talk about the dice mechanic. It uses d100, like *Call of Cthulhu*, but reads a 00 result as zero, instead of 100, generating a range from 00 to 99. Doubles (00, 11, 22, etc) are treated as critical results — a critical hit if the roll is a success, or a fumble if it's a failure. Degrees of difficulty are handled with an advantage/disadvantage mechanic: roll twice, and keep the best/worst roll.

See how elegant that is? See how it gives you varying degrees of outcome, and accounts for ease/difficulty, without turning your character sheet into a spreadsheet? It'd work even better in *Call of Cthulhu*, where (at least in 7th edition) you can have multiple bonus or penalty dice, allowing multiple levels of ease or difficulty.

Evlyn Moreau posted on Bluesky recently about how the stress-recovery mechanic in *Mothership* makes it work for slice-of-life sessions as well as horror.

Black Star

Black Star is a sci-fi game from LakeSide Games, the tabletop RPG publisher (located, I think, in Florida), not to be confused with Lakeside Games, the Finnish computer game publisher, or Lakeside Toys, the Minneapolis boardgame publisher. It's a popular name, is what I'm saying. If you're starting up a game company, and thinking of calling it Lakeside, maybe go with something else. Pondplace. Lagoon-Adjacent. Aquaproximous.

Specifically, *Black Star* is a *Star Wars* game with the serial numbers filed off. There's an evil Galactic Imperium, there are Star Knights with mystical Resonance powers and beamswords, there are aliens and bots, bounty hunters and smugglers, diplomats with blaster pistols, all that fun stuff. There's also a *Black Star Companion* that expands the rules, in case you want something less *Star War*sian and more *Dune*sque or *Star Trek*nical, giving you an alternative psionics system that doesn't carry the moral baggage of light-side-vs-dark-side, and fleshing out the space combat system a bit.

Physically, the two booklets (which you can get print-on-demand through Lulu) are adorably tiny. If you're familiar with the Oxford University Press "Very Short Introduction" series of books, that's the trim size of these, though the *Black Star* books are not as thick. About 4×7 inches, or 11×17 cm if you live in a country whose metric system wasn't stolen by pirates in 1793.

Mechanically, the resolution system uses 2d6. When you want to do a thing, you decide which of ten Abilities you're using. (Ability ranks range 0–5, but starting PCs are capped at 3, and unlikely to have any Abilities lower than 1.) Roll 2d6 (called your "Action Dice"), add your Ability rank, and if you get 9 or higher, success! If you roll lower, failure, *or* you can spend a Resolve point (these double as hit points, and you start off with 7 each session) to turn failure into a "costly success" — a partial success, or one that comes with some kind of setback or complication.

Ease and difficulty are represented, not by adjusting the target number, but by applying bonus and penalty dice. You roll extra dice, keeping the two best/worst as your two Action Dice.

The game seems designed for quick play

and GM improvisation. All of the dice-rolling is player-facing. When shooting at the stormtrooper, you roll Blasting for your PC; when the stormtrooper shoots back, you roll Speed to try to keep your PC from getting shot; nobody rolls for the NPC stormtrooper. Another feature that speeds things up is that damage is baked into the attack/defense roll: When making an attack, each 5 or 6 on an Action Die inflicts an extra point of damage, and on defense, each 1 or 2 on an Action Die means suffering another point of damage. While there are plenty of games that derive damage from the attack roll, I don't think I've seen this specific mechanic before.

Yet another time-saver for the GM is that NPC aren't statted out. They consist of a few Tags, each rated 1–3, which become that number of bonus or penalty dice when they're relevant.

Comments on E&A #1

Jim Vassilakos: Thank you for getting this all together!

Attronarch: I obviously haven't read any of the previous 75 installments of "Conquering the Barbarian Altanis," so I have to ask: Is the elf Rashomon unreliable when he describes events to others?

Mark Wilson: If you liked *Baby Driver*, you should also check out *Shaun of the Dead*, *Hot Fuzz*, and *The World's End*. as well as the TV series *Spaced*.

Patrick Riley: re "This clash of expected and preferred tone and aesthetics is at the heart of why the art in D&D 2024 rubs some the wrong way." Given the position *D&D* holds as the only tabletop RPG most people have ever heard of, should the game hold itself to a single aesthetic? Or would it be better to diversify the art styles to emphasize that every group's campaign can be different?

Comments on E&A #2

Patrick Riley: re the US equivalent of the English Received Pronunciation, this doesn't have a standard name in the US, but in the 20th century, actors and announcers were encouraged to speak in an invented accent sometimes called the "Mid-Atlanti" or "Transatlantic" accent. It was based on the accents of northeastern elites, but didn't precisely match the natural accent of any American region. This accent has largely fallen out of use, but it still turns up here and there. It's the accent Mark Hamill uses when he voices the Joker in Batman cartoons.

Jim Eckman: re sci-fi games, I've already talked about a few in this zine (*Scum and Villainy*, *Mothership*, *Black Star*, *Tiān Dēng*). A few others:

Orbital Blues is yet another unlicensed *Cowboy BeBop* RPG. If you want your PC to die in a blaze of glory with a cool soundtrack, this is the game for you!

The *Cairn* OSR RPG has inspired some sci-fi variants: *Meteor*, *Monolith*.

Jason Tocci's *2400* family of four-page mini-RPGs cover a variety of sub-genres of science fiction.

Cepheus Engine is an open-source retro-clone of *Traveller*, and has a ton of variants (*Cepheus Deluxe*, *Cepheus Light*, *Cepheus Quantum*, etc).

Joshua Kronengold: ryct Mark Nemeth about font shenanigans: It seems like a lot of y'all would benefit from the knowledge that MS Word can export PDF files.

Lisa Padol: re prisoners, there's always the option of leaving them tied up in a hotel-room closet and forgetting about them.

And I guess that's it. This is primarily a PDF apazine, right, not primarily a printed thing? That's why I'm using just plain click-'em-and-go hyperlinks rather than making the URLs visible in footnotes like I used to.

Apologies if someone out there is printing this out, and my backgrounds run you out of inkjet ink.

De Ludis Elficis Fictis

by Pum (AKA Paul Holman), Harrow, ENGLAND.

Email: Pum@Pum.org **August 2025** **Web:** http://www.pum.org

Recently I have mostly been …

… continuing to play in Michael Cule's Wednesday evening game of Runequest. We continue to be Lunar squadies visiting the big city of Outer Glamour to get medals or something pinned on our chests by the Red Emperor. Recently, we have witnessed Dragonrise (from the reasonably safe distance of Glamour), trailed and slayed some leggy-tongue monsters (Krarshtkid) in the sewers of Glamour, investigated further strange goings on in the sewers, which turned out to be more Krarshtkids and a temple or shrine to Cacodemon hiding in the basement of the temple of Uleria (where we killed the Cacodemon Rune Priestess), and investigated the kidnapping of our senatorial sort-of-patron's trollkin rent collector, freeing him from some trolls that seemed unusually interested in information about the senator's daughter.

Boardgaming has mostly been SETI and Agricola, with a few other games here and there. More uncomfortably hot spells have come and gone, and I continue to give thanks for my air conditioning unit in my study / games room.

IgTheme: Style & Session Desire

What is your playing style or what do you look for in an RPG session?

I suppose my style is probably viewed as rather light hearted, often interjecting a joke about the game situation or something. However, under that joking exterior, I take the game and plot seriously, trying to play my character appropriately and interestingly, trying to understand the mysteries of what is going on and figure out a plan, gambit or solution.

As far as what I look for in a session, I feel I'm a "bit of everything" sort of person. The general social aspect is important – a pleasant time with people I like and get along with. Also important is a good, interesting game plot or campaign story arc. A game system that everyone gets along with and groks to a reasonable level. Ideally, in each session every player gets "their moment" when they do something that feels at least a bit awesome! I like maps, so occasionally a chance to make a map, or use a nice map in an interesting way. Interesting new rules or game mechanics can occasionally be fun, but it can also be a bit hit or miss.

Oh and a nice cup of tea and some biscuits.

Comments

Re AI art, I'm terrible at art myself, so I love a tool that allows me to produce good looking art from my ideas. However, I hate that AI businesses are ripping all and sundry art for training material without permission of copyright owners and without compensation; and to add insult to injury, they are using it to probably build a technology that will put those same artists out of business!

I'm very much of the belief that if a technology can be done then it will be done, for better or worse, but it should be done ethically and legally. Those multi-billion dollar businesses ripping all the copyright works for training should be sued into the ground and bosses jailed, just like individual copyright infringers have been in the past.

#1 Heath Row: I struggle with the idea of solo RPGs, but I find write ups interesting nonetheless. Having said that, I think some world building can resemble solo RPGing quite a lot.

#2 Gabriel Roark: re A&E issues, I believe Lee and Barry have scans of all issues available at $2 each, and retain the rights to all issues of A&E. I hope they have made arrangements for them to be available in perpetuity. FWIW, I have hardcopy #96, #237-306 (#262 missing for some reason), and e-copies from #306 onwards.

#2 Myles Corcoran: re SETI, yes, it is very pretty, with the very appealing cardboard orrery. It gets even more pretty if you put an LED light inside the translucent sun! It is probably best played with 3 players, and I have played it within about 3 hours with players who have played once before. I also recently played a 4 player game preceded by a thorough teach within 4 hours.

#2 Michael Cule: RYCT Timothy about alleged messages from God made me think of them like spam emails from fake gods and laugh.

#2 Lisa Padol: I like your new font size which I find much more readable on my Android tablet, which is where I mostly read E&A.

#2 Jim Eckman: re sci-fi game rules, there was SPI's Universe RPG, which I have a copy with a lovely local map of our real galaxy. Also, see Scum & Villainy. 25 players for Bushido – eek! In a single face-to-face session?

——===### Everyone else, RAEBNC ###===——

Twisting the Rope #3

Stronger Than Pride[1]

I marched in the Cork Pride Parade[2] with the Mammies for Trans Rights group and my two kids. I managed to sunburn my neck as shown. I've made the best of a bad lot and created a bi-pride flag below from the UV damage. The parade was glorious, however, and both attendees and by-standers were out in good numbers. Love is love.

The kids have been regular Pride goers for several years now, as well as marching in the weekly aid for Gaza march in Cork. I'm happy they're both conscientious citizens and stand up for the causes they believe in.

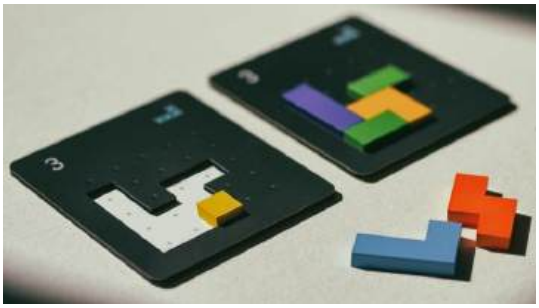
IgTheme: What is your playing style or what do you look for in an RPG session?

If there's one word to describe my playing style it's lazy. I don't like large amounts of prep. I don't like complex rules and mechanics. Our regular sessions are very much in the vein of conversations punctuated by the occasional die roll. I try not to overproduce background lore or setting details before play, as I much prefer to see where the players take the story. My GMing style is therefore reactive. This can cause some difficulties as my players are often at a loss as to what to do next, so I like to throw many potential story hooks at them in hopes that maybe someone will grab at something they want to pursue.

As a player, my style is very much informed from being primarily a GM for most of my role-playing history. I try to give feedback to the GM, grab plot hooks if I can and err on the side of action over inaction whenever possible.

Mutterings

I played Project L[3] with the work games group recently. It's a clever game of placing Tetris-like tetrominoes to fill certain shapes and score points by doing so. Lovely pieces, with an *Azul*-like tactile quality, and some interesting decision points as play progresses. The choice of playing for immediate points is balanced against the need to diversify your tetrominoes to allow you to complete more complex shapes. There's a mechanic for trading up simpler shapes for more complex ones, but that takes an action you might want



[1] The sun was in this instance.
[2] Plenty of great photos here - https://www.flickr.com/photos/corkpride/albums/72177720328158480/
[3] https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/260180/project-l. Picture: "Project L - Example of Pieces in Play" - CC BY-NC Chris McCleary.

to spend on something else. I enjoyed the game and would play it again. The person who brought the game to the club has a fancy bells-and-whistles edition (from a Kickstarter I believe) that includes expansions for when you feel you've exhausted the basic game, but I'd say there's plenty of potential for play in the initial set.

A Mausritter Campaign

I have been running *Mausritter* (https://mausritter.com) for my gaming group. A band of brave mice work to defend their home, explore their world and become the heroes of Oak Home, their mouse town at the centre of the map.

The characters and their players are:

Sky, a sparrow-rider with an aerial mount, Miss Clutterbuck, played by Sam Mullaney.

Can-can, an ex-dancer and tin miner, played by Marie Lane.

Gwedolene, an ale-brewer, sometimes accompanied by Vicent, a drunken porter-mouse, played by Kate Sheehy.

Odette Snow, a foreign mouse and dam builder, played by Alex Ferguson.

Ambrose, a scrawny wireworker, singed with electrical burns, played by Peter MacHale.

Previously: The mouse crew rescued a frog called Philbert who was apparently a human in frog shape. Can CanCan kissed the confused frog to no avail Philbert exclaimed, "I'm not that kind of frog!"

"Perhaps Can-can isn't that sort of mouse?" mused the others.

They took Philbert back to their wagon and gave him some beer, which helped with his recovery from the bandits' assault. With their new companion they continued on to the River House, a mouse-run hostel on the river bank north of the poppy fields. The proprietor, Emerald Green, was surprised by Philbert's predicament and recounted what she knew of faerie transformations. With some questioning, Philbert recalled the words of the faery's curse. "Stay in this shape until you find a woman to take you as you are." Sky spoke for the others and vowed to help the froggy fellow.

Later the group and Philbert were back in Oak Home. Moira Alder the Mayor-mouse was pleased with the shipment of glazed acorns but more than a little concerned to have a human in Oak Home, even if one temporarily inconvenienced by a batrachian appearance. She took the news of Baron Oswald's demise with better cheer, however, and allowed that the group could keep Philbert in Oak Home long enough to question the wise-mouse, Burdock Pip, and plan their next move.

Odette and Gwen acted on Moira's advice and paid Burdock Pip a visit. Suitably loosened with a generous draught of beer, Burdock's memories of childhood encounters with local faeries pointed towards a waterfall east of Oak Home deep in the forest. He remembers meeting Boulder Face, a magical speaking rock, standing by the foot of the waterfall. As a child Burdock never summoned the courage to pierce the waterfall, but Boulder Face assured him that a faery witch named Winter Ash

lived in the caves beyond. The two younger mice take back Burdock's tale to the others and they decide to visit the waterfall. Gwen reminds them of Burdock's parting warning. "Prospero the Owl Wizard had dealings with the witch. Be on guard for enchantments and beware the silent wings that bring death."

The mice made their preparations to travel to the waterfall, packing gifts they thought might please a faery, including more beer, smooth, river-washed stones and a bone comb. The travel was uneventful as the group gave the forbidden cave a wide berth and camped quietly in the hollow of a tree at the end of the first night abroad. They reached the waterfall and accompanying pool just as the sun climbed to its zenith on the second day. The sound of falling water filled the glade. Across the pool they spied a curious rock that resembled a craggy human face. It returned their gaze with a steady look.

The group of mice picked their way around the pool to approach the stone head. "Are you Boulder Face?" asked one of the timid mice. "What? What? Speak up!" Boulder Face boomed, "And stand somewhere I can see you!"

Gwen mustered her courage and stepped forward to introduce herself and companions. The conversation was rather one-sided until she realised that two crevices at the sides of Boulder Face's head were in fact ears, and rather clogged with old birds' nests. She cleaned out the stone head's ears and things went much better thereafter.

With introductions complete, Boulder Face was clearly happy to have conversation partners. He talked in a meandering fashion about mice, the pool, the passing of the seasons and cheeky birds with their nests. Eventually the mice directed the conversation around to the topic of frogs and one frog in particular. "I remember this fellow! He spied on Winter Ash at her toilet, silly bugger." Though fixed as any rocky head would be, Boulder Face gave a strong impression of shaking his head in disapproval. "He's lucky he's just a frog and not a meal for a passing fox."

The mice began to wonder if Philbert was as much an innocent victim as he'd first made himself out to be. Philbert had the grace to blush, but was adamant that he was more sinned against than sinner. "I want to explore the caves behind the waterfall," he added. "There might be something to help reverse this curse."

At that point, Ambrose noticed a figure behind the waterfall above. They were being watched. With an exaggerated wave and song-and-dance, Ambrose excused himself from the group to "visit the little mouse's room" behind a tree, and began working his way around the pool to approach the rock face beside the waterfall from the other side, hoping to remain unseen by their curious observer.

The group's discussion of the wisdom or lack thereof in exploring the caves proved distracting enough to allow Ambrose to draw close to the observer. "Hello," Ambrose began, "pleased to meet you."

The frog—for frog he was—leapt in the air and very nearly tumbled over the waterfall from the slippery ledge he perched on. "Oh, stars and snowflakes! You gave me an awful fright."

Ambrose apologised for the startlement and offered a worm-ration sandwich to settle the frog's nerves. Simon Frog, as he called himself, took the offer gratefully and sat to one side of the waterfall to compose himself. From below, Gwen called up to check on Ambrose. "Ssshh!" Simon hissed. "You don't want to wake her up."

"Wake up who?" asked Ambrose. "Winter Ash, the moon priestess, obviously. She is very particular about her beauty sleep." He finished his sandwich and rose from his slippery seat. "Come, we can talk more down below." With that, he dove neatly off the cliff face, down the waterfall into the pool below and emerged by the bank next to Boulder Face. "Ah, Simon!" said the rock, "may I introduce you to my new, small friends." Ambrose assayed a similar dive with less grace, and shook himself as the others helped him from the pool.

Simon Frog turned out to be as garrulous as Boulder Face. He said he was a servant of the faerie witch, Winter Ash, and gladly warned the mice adventurers of the perils in the caves: a magic mirror, a

moon-lit pool with talking fish and powerful mushroom that emitted choking spores, along with the fearsome majesty of the Moon priestess herself, Winter Ash.

Gwen and Ambrose asked if the faery witch would approve of gifts. "She would be grateful if the mushrooms were dealt with," Simon noted, as the spores prohibited her from accessing a portion of the moon temple she was anxious to get into.

The air all about turned suddenly chill, and a frost rimed Boulder Face's features.

A voice, chill as mid-winter, spoke. "I do so love gifts. What have you brought me?"

As though stepping from an unseen door, Winter Ash was there. Pale as frost and clad in inky-black robes, she stood towering over the mice and frogs. The sound of falling water faded and all around was still as though the forest was draped in muffling snow.

"Only I do hate to be disappointed," she continued. "That never ends well…"

Comments on E&A 002

John Redden: I'm sorry to hear about ICE agents interfering with your business. No search warrant, no uniform? Might as well just call them thugs.

I liked the interesting mechanic you used for skill selection in the TF-1 game. It seems like a reasonable way to get a spread of skills. Did any of the players feel shortchanged?

RYCT me: The *Mausritter* PCs do meet up with a kleptomaniac rabbit later in the campaign. The game as written supports only mice PCs, but I've seen fan-made supplements to extend the PCs choices. The game is clearly inspired by some of the same sources that inspired *Bunnies and Burrows*.

Brian Rogers: Great to see you in these pages, Brian! I hope you survived your first 5k run, and enjoy[4] many more.

I liked your write-up of **The Eye**. I've long been impressed by your command of *Villains & Vigilantes* and the way you work the rules to model the characters you create. I love the idea of an astral projection as a PC, with several or even dozens of sessions before anyone even suspects that there's a body somewhere projecting the astral form.

I'm also impressed that you've been able to run *13th Age* for a large group of teenagers. I ran *13th Age* during the first edition playtest for Pelgrane with my regular group of adults and found it difficult to juggle all the different powers and effects. I can't imagine a large table of teens would make that any easier, though perhaps their youth would help with absorbing and retaining rules details my aging group find less appealing.

I love the OUT idea in *13th Age*, and sympathise with Numina's player for the long delay in choosing a name and OUT. For some people I suspect that making a choice feels like having to give up so many other potential choices that it's hard to do.

And evil Duolingo owls? Perfect!

RYCT Pum: "do we press on with our ever dwindling pools or do we let the opposition have time to advance their plans?" This touches on a problem I have with resource management in games in the OSR or D&D spell-slot vein. I find it hard to instill a sense of urgency in my players to get them to expend resources, and don't like leaning too hard on the 'bad guys are going "to do something by midnight"' to provide a time pressure. I do like *Apocalypse World* clocks as a mechanic. It feels more even-handed to advance a clock when the players fluff a roll or fail to act than to rule by fiat that the bad guys burn the village/steal the maguffin/eat the cake. I say this knowing that as GM I set the clock just as much as I have the bad guys burn a village, but it feels more balanced to me.

[4] For certain values of "enjoy."

Patrick Riley: Re your gaming biography: I empathise with not finding LARPS attractive. I've played in a few and invariably found the loudest, most confident players dominated. A generous player makes room to bring everybody in, but not all players are that generous. Your starship bridge in the classroom sounds epic. I would have loved to play something like that in high school.

Re How much for a finger: This highlights one of my pet peeves about the cheese paring that point buy systems are prone to.

Re Anan's player in the Adventurers Guild: I wish I had a rules monkey to help other players navigate the rules in my games. My regular group tends to use simple systems at least in part because none of the players is keen to learn and apply more crunchy rulesets.

Chimeras make for great trophies. So many heads to collect.

Gabriel Roark: Thanks for the positive reaction to the Mausritter map. I don't remember where I got the hex map. It's not like the design used in the rule book, so I guess it's one one I had knocking around. The separated hexes design makes me think of GURPS or Man to Man but checking BoardGameGeek for Man to Man I can see it used broken but flush hex edges. Now you've drawn my eye to it, I can't unsee it and may have to redraw the whole map!

Re lengthy contributions: Small, but perfectly formed, that's us.

Re the roster of A&E back issues: I don't have the PDFS of #309-398 but I do have the individual sub-zines as PDF or Word docs from Lee's original mailouts.

Attronarch: That's a lot of dead rats. I like the accompanying artwork.

Pedro Panhoca da Silva and Maira Zucolotto: *Ecos da fantasia* sounds an impressive collection of solo adventures, with a satisfying spread of topics, protagonists and styles. I don't see much in the way of solo gamebooks in the Anglo gaming sphere any more, but I'm out of touch. Do you know if there's any such community? Apologies if this is something covered in A&E previously.

George Phillies: The work games club is mostly Euro style games. There are a couple of grognard/old farts like myself who came from a hex and counter wargame background, but most of the group are too young to have experienced even the twilight years of SPI, Avalon Hill, and so on. My regular RPG group are not *D&D* fans, so OD&D wouldn't attract much interest. I did run a pared-back D20 game called *Microlite20* many years ago, which was fun and seemed to interest the group.The setting later got repurposed for my Nine Gates campaign, which used *Dungeon World* (an early Powered by the Apocalypse game).

Mark Nemeth: Re cooperators or adversaries: It's one of the core features of RPGs that unlike, say, a Choose Your Adventure book or a CRPG video game, the GM as mediator allows PCs to attempt anything that the table agrees is possible. In my experience things break down when players and the GM don't share the same sense of the mood and genre of the game. If the players think the game is a swashbuckling affair with larger than life comedic pirates they will crash hard if the GM thinks he or she is running a gritty game of desperate piracy against the overwhelming forces of the Royal Navy. Understanding and managing expectations is one of the core jobs of the GM. In exchange I think that players need to buy into the campaign premise and not treat everything the GM introduces as a trap.

Re *Daggerheart* art: As a general point, the default art style really turns me off and feels repetitive and bland. *Daggerheart* is not the only guilty party, obviously, as the WotC house style dominates a lot of the imagery of high fantasy RPGs and leaves me similarly cold.

Dylan Capel: Re online games and the difficulty of incorporating tokens etc: Online games can make some things easier, like pre-prepared maps and positioning miniatures, but in our games I like being able to scribble an off-the-cuff map or diagram and I feel online gaming makes impromptu stuff a bit harder to pull off.

Michael Cule: The uncle god as Doc Cross just seems right.

Re housing stock in the British Isles not being built for heatwaves: A work friend recently bought a new house, super-insulated and built with an impressive energy efficiency rating. The hot weather drove the interior temperatures up over 30°C. We north-western Europeans (and our housing stock) are not built for the heat. Mind you, should the AMOC collapse we'll soon find we're not built for Baltic conditions either.

Re the Lunar Tarsh soldiers: Recalling other write-ups of yours, it is entirely unsurprising that Graham forgot the piece of paper with the contact details. Does he do it on purpose or is that the way he is?

Re the IgTheme: I agree. Sometimes the best way to play a super-smart villain is to wait and disguise their responses as genius planning and not lazy GM syndrome.

Pum: Michael's Lunar game sounds fun, both from the GM's description and your's as one of the players.

Re *Mausritter*: It's a straightforward roll under your stat d20 game, with some interesting inventory mechanics I liked when I read but which don't really see much use in play. Have I mentioned that my players don't like complexity in game mechanics? I wonder sometimes if they'd baulk at a simple roll high = good, roll low = bad mechanic and leave the rest up to table interpretations. That would allow everyone to use their favourite die, which is important to some people. However, some players like being able to use all their different sorts of dice, so maybe…

Inspiration strikes. How about you choose your die and count the number of faces as the risk your PC is willing to take. Roll a d4 and neither success nor failure (high vs. low) is very impactful on the fiction. Roll a d20 and you open up options for massive success (say 19-20) or catastrophic failure (1-2). A risk adverse player might only roll d6s, while a gambling sort would always roll a d20 for funsies.

Thank you for the kind words about the *Mausritter* map. I love having an artefact of a campaign, particularly one that grows as the player characters explore their world.

Jim Eckman: Re Science Fiction games systems: I've had success with simple D6 SF using the *Star Wars* RPG rules from West End Games, *Diaspora*, a

Patrick Zoch: That's a lovely map! I like the cross-hatching and the tri-fold layout of the storeys. I picture *Pendragon* knights storming up the stairs.

hard SF game based on the *Fate* rules system, and most recently a *Traveller* meets *Firefly* homage called *Offworlders*, which uses a pared-down Powered by the Apocalypse system. If you are looking for a small freighter as a roving base for the PCs, *Offworlders* worked well for us, but doesn't lean heavily on tactical space combat or Newtonian physics. That game, like my current *Mausritter,* generated a map as a campaign artefact that demonstrates the jump point set-up I used for interstellar travel in our game (see adjacent pic).

Heath Row: It always surprises me to see the issue numbers of *White Dwarf* magazines today. I stopped getting the magazine back around the time it switched from a general hobby focus to solely Games Workshop output, and specifically *Warhammer+WH40K* minis games. I think I dropped out around issue #97, and it's at #513+ now!

Re *Goblin Quest*: The stable of goblins reminds me of *Dungeon Crawl Classics* adventure funnels and earlier, the clever family of clones idea from *Paranoia*. The end result of your Goblin quest does sound suitably chaotic and fun.

Thanks for the praise for the staff boardgaming club. It's been a great benefit to my mental health over the pandemic, and I've made some good friends in the process. I'd recommend it!

Mark A. Wilson: Re Conversations with Lucifer: I'm reminded of a comedian routine about dealing with toddler tantrums and finally giving in. "Okay, you can have what you want," she says. The worked-up toddler replies, "I don't want what I want!"

The Origins murder mystery sounds intriguing. I've sometimes introduced a mystery in a game session without really having an idea how to resolve it. I find the players usually do a better job than I would of complicating things nicely before finding a satisfying resolution.

Clark Timmins: What a pity that you couldn't include the cut-up dungeon. I agree completely that meaning emerges from play. The human hardwiring to seek stories is one of our weak spots when it comes to dealing with LLMs and the pseudo-intelligent output created by generative AI. We can't help but think there's a mind behind the curtain.

I prefer the term 'Jaquay' to 'xander' when it comes to dungeon design, as a nod to Janelle Jaquays' original dungeon designs that showcased circular and multiple path dungeons.

Joshua Kronengold: Hi Josh! Re *Mausritter*: Definitely one of the OSR adjacent d20 games. It's roll under one of three stats so mechanically simple. There's some inventory management by slot mechanics that I forget to use, just like most encumbrance/inventory mechanics.

RYCT Michael Cule re the commonplace wizard in RPGs being much rarer in the inspiring literature: There's a long-running vein of power fantasy in RPGs, and blowing things up with fireballs etc. is very satisfying in a game. It feels less satisfying in a novel if the protagonist steamrollers every opposition with Big Bang spells.

RYCT Mark Nemeth about *Gumshoe* Drives: I should implement something similar for the milquetoast player(s) in my group who run from plot hooks. I like the nod in *Sword of the Serpentine* to the best things in Conan's life.

Lisa Padol: Hi Lisa! Thanks for organizing Something Completely Different. I hope you get some good stuff.

RYCT George Phillies re *Masks of Nyarlathotep* changing over editions: I played the first edition of Masks, but I'm curious to know what's changed over the various editions. I know there was an extra chapter added relatively early, I want to say an Australian section?

RYCT Patrick Riley re published scenarios at cons: I'd like to know if a scenario is home-brewed or published before play, but it's not a deal-breaker either way. I dislike players who use prior knowledge to "game" the scenario to their advantage, be it from reading a published scenario or knowing the home-brewing scenario writer well.

Re money as a PC motivator in games: I've found it hit or miss. I love the genre trope of starting each session broke like Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser, for example, but it can grate on players' nerves after a bit. Once again, aligning genre and player expectations is important. To some degree though, the players have to buy into the setting and genre. I hate when a player brings a loner PC to a supers team game like *Legion of Super Heroes*, for example, even though there's plenty of genre examples of the same.

Re *Mausritter*: The system is straightforward d20 roll under your stat. Three stats: Strength, Dexterity, Will. It's enough for us to be getting on with. Character improvement raises your stats, which may become a problem if we play long enough that every mouse is an Olympic-level weight lifter and gymnast with Doc Savage levels of willpower. Luckily I can usually rely on my players to get into pickles where simple saving throws aren't enough to wriggle out.

RYCT Paul Holman (PUM) on using a different rule set for the same setting/adventure: Years ago my group played a long-running game we called Tudor Talents, which started off using *Wild Talents*, switched to *Mutants and Masterminds*, before finally settling on a d12-based variant of *Hero Wars*. The setting remained the same and the PCs navigated the world successfully after each switch. You'll note that the rule complexity probably dropped with each transition. Maybe I should have started with a simpler system and avoided any translation heartaches.

RYCT Mark Nemeth re the balcony and GMs/writers not thinking through implications: It's like IT security (e.g. cryptography). It's easy to think up security that would be hard for you to break. Not so easy to think up security that *no one* could break. Many heads see options that a solitary GM or author doesn't even think about. It's a strong argument for playtesting scenarios and games. The designer cannot imagine ahead of time all the weird shit that players might try.

Brian Misiaszek: RYCT Dylan Capel re Ukraine and the crumbling world order: I'm just so tired of it all. I know we have to fight but lately it's felt like the darker angels of human nature are in the ascendent and truth, whatever that is, is meaningless. I know that people are in the main good and supportive of one another but the 24 hour media circus plays into this feeling of powerlessness and gloom. Fuck 'em all.

Re zine meanings: I've no idea what *Ever & Anon* means, beyond continuity with *A&E* and a pleasing reversal of initials. My own zine, *Twisting the Rope*, is from the Irish, *casadh an súgáin*, meaning to twist a rope from straw. It's a reference to a W.B. Yeats story. "In 'The Twisting of the Rope' from 'Tales of Red Hanrahan' W.B. Yeats tells of an incident during which Hanrahan was tricked by the woman of the house where he was a guest. As the night wore on the poet became obstreperous so the clever woman hit on a plan whereby she got Hanrahan to twist a rope. As the rope lengthened he moved backwards step by step until he found himself outside the door. The woman immediately made a rush and slammed and bolted the door on him[5]." It's also a reference to *Twisting the Rope,* an urban fantasy murder mystery by R.A. MacAvoy, the second in the Tea with the Black Dragon series of novels, much beloved of my wife, Sam. I wanted another Celtic reference after Rowan Tree and Red Thread and I love multiple meanings.

Your history of the turbulent presidency of Machado was fascinating. The closing comments outlining his denial of wrongdoing and his boasts made my hackles rise, even a remove of over 90 years.

Prompted by your comment to Mark A. Wilson, I also read Mark's review of *Top Ten Games You Can Play In Your Head*. I look at my copy of that book on my shelf and, sad to say, I have to agree. What a waste of money that was.

Jim Vassilakos & Timothy Collinson: RYCT George Phillies re dungeon economics: It's reminiscent of how to make a small fortune in RPG publishing. Start with a large fortune and the rest follows naturally.

---

[5] https://www.sligoheritage.com/archtwistingropes.htm

Re psychology/morality of aliens: There is Donald E. Brown's list of human universals which outline common elements of human culture that transcend region or local culture. The list can act as a good launch pad for thinking of non-human intelligence. A summary is here: https://condor.depaul.edu/~mfiddler/hyphen/humunivers.htm .

One of the things I'd liked most about the Hivers in the Traveller setting was their lack of parental care/love for their offspring. That seemed properly alien, and nice to see r/K selection theory [6] getting a nod in a game supplement.

I'm glad you're enjoying the *Mausritter* write-ups.

Re level advancement in *D&D*: I've long thought that PCs in *D&D* settings had some sense of levels, if only because the magic-using classes are clearly aware of spell levels and their breakpoints. I still regret that James Wallis never got to publish *FRUP*, his parody of *D&D* where people were aware in-setting of levels etc, by virtue of filling out their own character sheets and carrying them around like government issued documents. The character sheets bore no resemblance to the owners, necessarily, and a stack of HPs on your sheet didn't mean squat against a charging bull etc.

Re the meaning of Phoenix Nest: I imagine many a cockbird died only to be reborn in the phoenix's nest. Ahem.

All contents licensed under Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike4.0 International

Myles Corcoran - 20 Brookfield Park, Cork T12 K7V7 - Ireland

myles.corcoran@gmail.com - https://mastodon.ie/@deetwelve

[6] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/R/K_selection_theory

All words and pictures © Mitch Hyde 2025
(Except pg.6, used with permission)
www.dreadlordgames.com
No AI has been used

I have returned from frigid Hyborean wastes! Witness me! In this second edition of DREADSWORD, I continue the saga of my AD&D campaign, starting with the first session after joining the ADDKON server.

Later, there is another player description of their primary character, including an illustration of him.

We return to our Saga, just after the campaign moved into the ADDKON gaming server. The characters in the first session were;

* **Felaern** - an Elf Thief 2
* **Burspur** - a Dwarf Fighter 2
* **Orwell Seventhson** - A Human MU 2
* **Ekon** - a human Ranger 5
* A few light footmen to guard the horses

After meeting each other at the Inn of the Potent Paladin these four adventurers decided to strike out at the lower levels of the Haunted Bordello. They had previously learned from a captive elf that those marked with the symbol of the Curwin Cult (a black cube) might pass through the vaulted antechamber to the lower level without rousing the many zombies that were interred there.

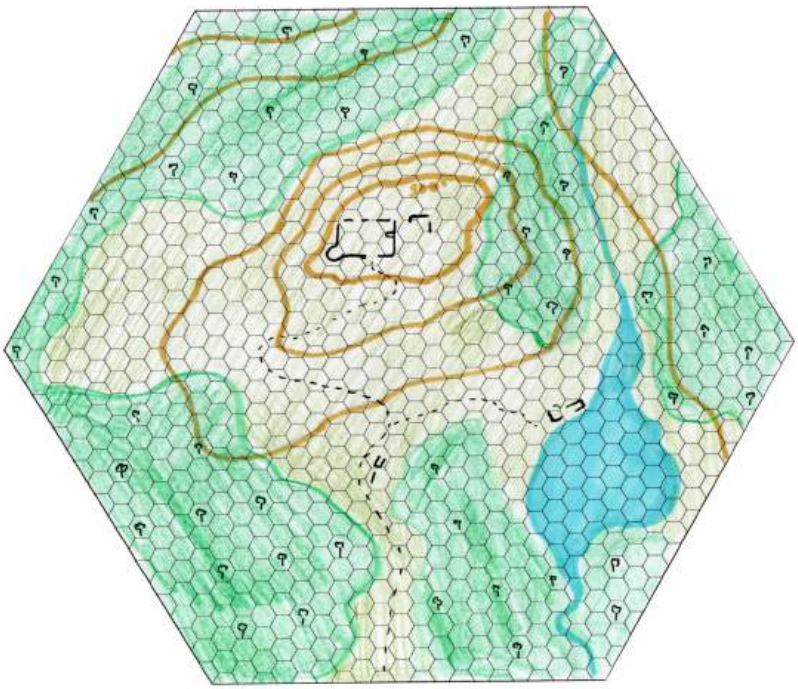
Orwell thought this a splendid idea, ever ready for adventure. The others thought him odd, dressed as he was in a strange wrestling outfit and mask made from crocodile skin. The outlander said that this costume imbued him with special powers. This was one of two new PCs to enter the campaign from one of the other games. Orwell's suit was the product of a wish to be 'the greatest wrestler in the world.' It bestowed him with a STR score of 18/00. This was but one of the first odd items coming into the campaign.

The other stranger was a wandering Ranger wearing magic chainmail that was covered in bone white runes - the dark tongue of long forgotten and evil gods. His head was shaven and his face painted like a skull. A stern follower of Ahriman the Just, High Priest of Hecate (a high level PC from another game). "I follow in Ahriman's wake and claim souls for the lord of eternal night and death."

Gearing up with provisions the party gathered their horses and rode out to the ruin. All the while Burspur and Felaern relaying the necessary details about their battle with the Rat Riders and the capture of a devil worshiping elf. But most importantly of all, "there is an owl bear in the dungeon, it lives in a small outhouse, and perhaps also somewhere in the east of the dungeon's first level."

It was decided that this creature should be avoided at all costs. Extra meat rations had been purchased to throw as bait should they encounter it.

The party arrived at the bordello just after noon, some of their footmen were left to guard the horses in the woods below the hill. I attach the most recent map of the Bordello's upper works here. This map is shown to the players, and I have a zoomed in map of the ruin proper they also have access to.



THE CURWIN RUIN
aka THE HAUNTED BORDELLO

They approached the SW tower of the ruin, through the crumbling gatehouse. No strange wails were being emitted on this day, perhaps the ghosts of the bordello were resting? They opened the trap door in the base of the tower and entered the first level, lantern lit, Burspur's magical longsword that he had taken from the evil elf shed a wan light ahead.

They passed through the dancing hall, and beyond the large double doors, through the hallways lined with wash rooms; this was the

area they had discovered the cultist robes. “Speaking of which,” they reminded themselves, “lets not forget these.” They donned the robes and gambeson embroidered with a black cube. Just as they did so, they heard from a short distance, that horrible wailing and yapping echoing down the corridor. Then, the terrible sounds of scrambling at a lop-sided door.

“The owl bear!”

They readied themselves, looking about for the quickest means of exit. The weak door ahead of them buckled, bowed, then shot in, thrown back by a padded paw. And then the creature shambled forth, its yipping bark echoing through the bleak halls.

“This is it?” Orwell muttered, “this is your owl bear?”

For standing before them were two giant badgers with their fangs bared.

“No, no, this is not it.” Falaern denied.

“Certainly, there is an owl bear around somewhere. We aren’t making it up. These critters must have come into the dungeon since we killed the bandits.” Burspur added.

Orwell was likely raising an eyebrow, though his mask obscured his face. The magic user walked towards them and threw them a fistful of rations, which the creatures lapped up hungrily before dashing off into the shadows of the dungeon.

“Owlsbears. Hmm.”

“I’m sure we will run into them sooner or later.”

The party continued down the stairwell, through the broken secret door in what was once a throne room. Behind that they passed the large stone door that contained a magical statue, and into the vaulted room with the stairs down a level. The chamber was lined with alcoves, within each a zombies hung on a hook. In each of these rotting creatures foreheads was a rune etched gemstone.

“Oh how I want those gems.” Burspur pondered. His friends convinced him not to touch them again. Each PC ensured the sign of a black cube was firmly attached to his clothes, and with a deep breath walked the narrow zombie lined corridor. Across the large glowing rune on the floor they marched.

As they passed over the rune a light erupted from it and rushed over their bodies. With a tendril like appendage it caressed the cube on their chest, and dissipated.

The corpses remained cold and lifeless in the alcoves around them.

“It worked.”

They went down the stairs, finding a long chamber. Directly ahead of them was a bronze plaque etched with a cube and a statement in common; POWER THROUGH SERVICE.

Along the wall was painted a baroque tableau, which depicted a queer city of iron towers. The scene’s sky contained a black sun and many winged women in flight. At either end of the room were statues of cruel-eyed women with vulture wings. They were sat upon their haunches and bent forward with puckered lips.

Ekon pushed his companions aside, and approach the western statue. Without a moments hesitation he gave the statue a smooch on the mouth. And waited. Nothing happened.

“Worth a try.”

In the north there was a chamber where several skeletons were found lain across the floor, apparently having died in a skirmish long ago, for their corroded weapons were close to their hands. The party discovered an archway in that room where the keystone was carved in the shape of a partially canine, partially reptilian face. The gruesome head was crowned with a single horn in its forehead. The floor below this arch had an iron grate set into it, which caused the party some alarm. They inspected the keystone and found a pipe within it’s mouth. A trap! They jumped through the archway, doing their best not to set it off.

Beyond the arch was a narrow hallway where the rough stonework gave way to plastered walls. Around a corner they saw something squatting in an alcove; a statue of a winged beast. They approached and saw it had the same face as the keystone they had passed under. Beyond this statue the corridor was lined with several doors.

“That looks awfully like a gargoyle.”

The party stared at the statue a while. Unlike the vulture women in the previous room, it didn’t appear to be on a plinth, but sat upon the flagstones. They were intently suspicious, but it didn’t seem to move. They moved beyond it. And entered the first door on their left.

As they did, the statue behind them rose up and charged. The party quickly tried to slam the door, but the creature managed to get its foot and hand in the way.

Orwell looked around the room, it was some sort of wizards study, there was a pentagram summoning circle carved into the floor. A lectern was next to the circle, and along the wall a book case filled a four volume treatise bound in dubious skin, whose spine read ‘Devil-Lore and the Planes of Hell, by Xamorn the Black.’

“Help us close this blasted door!” His allies yelled as all three of them shoved.

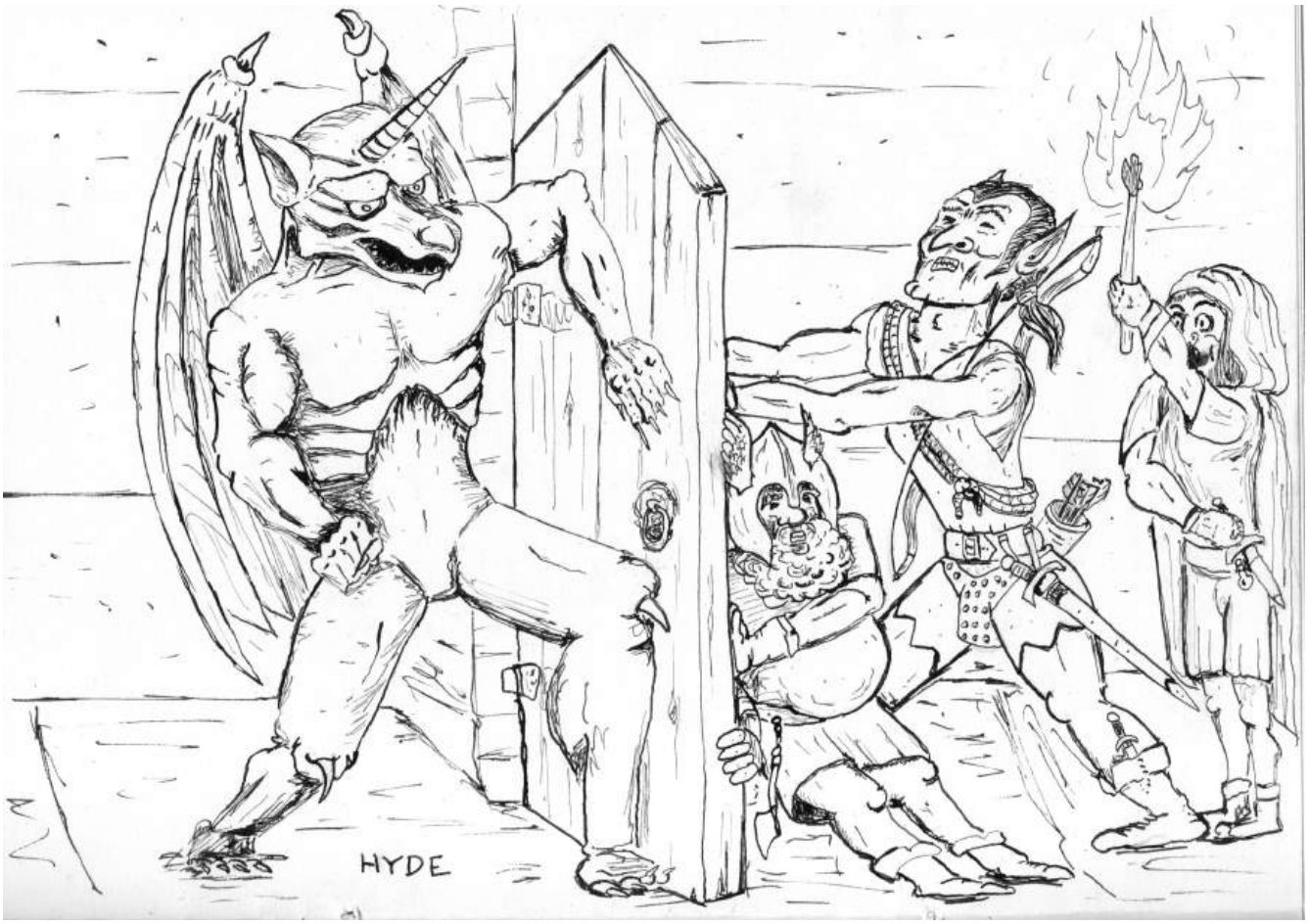
The creature was, inch by inch, cracking the door open. Giving in to the eventuality of battle, Burspur drew his magic sword and began swinging. Ekon soon joined him. The creature had a ferocious attack repertoire that flayed open the dwarf’s hauberk. The battle for survival had begun. The ranger and dwarf desperately parried and and tried to strike the creature. The rangers weapon striking true, but yielding no damage. They were trapped in the room.

“We have to do something!”

Orwell was desperately searching through his backpack, “Aha!” He rushed forward and loosed a small sack of marbles at the feet of the creature.

It lunged, slipped, and flailed wildly to keep its footing.

“Go!” Shouted the ranger, and together they rushed forward, knocking the beast to its belly and dashing across its back. They fled east back to the archway with the ominous head keystone and looked back.



“We forgot to grab the books, they looked expensive.”

“I’m sure I spied a spell book on the top shelf also. We will have to return another day for it. Lets get out of here!”

They leapt through the arch, making sure not to touch the floor within the archway. They turned to check if they were being followed, and heard scrambling of marbles. Then there was silence.

Before leaving, they checked one further chamber that led from the 2nd level foyer. It lead to a small chamber. This contained more vulture winged female statues, this time they held aloft serpentine blades. Between them was a vaulted arch, highly decorative in its masonry.

Thinking better than to traverse through the arch, they packed up and left. Whilst passing through the upper level, they once again heard the wailing sounds come echoing through the halls.

“Your owl bear friends back for another visit?”

The party left and rode back to Bayfry. They took it upon themselves to visit the wizard Dagomon to inform him of what they’d seen in the guarded study. Dagomon informed them he would happily purchase the books if they were able to liberate them from the guardian.

And so a plan was hatched to return and do just that.

But that is a story for the next issue.

Burspur at lvl 4 - Illustrated by Magnus

Submitted by player Magnus:

One of the more seasoned adventurers currently residing in the Inn of the Potent Paladin, is Burspur the Careless. Fighting opiate abuse and demon possession has given this dwarf a unwelcoming and haggard look. He is dressed in a simple cloak, utilitarian platemail and wields a wooden shield and a curved elven blade taken from the corpse of a nameless victim. Witnessing too many of his companions die during fruitless expeditions and dangerous delves has made Burspur cold and cynical, he is now primarily motivated by greed, lust for power and self preservation. Burspur's middle-aged joints and adipose disposition makes him slow and sluggish. Consequently, most opponents are taken by surprise by Burspurs` effective, intelligent, and pragmatic fighting-style. Unlike other knights and swordsmen, he is not prone to flaunting displays of skill. Burspurs swings of the blade are as precise as they are hateful. Recently he has made short work of cultists, slavers, pimps and swine-men and subsequently relieved them of their possessions. Such deeds can hardly go undetected, and Burspur has become an unlikley hero in Bayfry. Local nobility was practically forced to make a knight of this upstart dwarf, when he presented the Castilian of Bayfry with 50 Orc skulls.

Burspur has taken for his heraldic device a broken skull with a raven on either side, adorned with blue banners. He claims the ravens are a symbol of knowledge, and the cracked skull a symbol of conflict resolution. Such motifs being too morbid, grim, and uncommon amongst local nobility, many locals believe these symbols belong to Burspurs dwarven clan. Truth is somewhat more sinister. Burspur belongs to no clan but his own, and his heraldry is simply a reflection of what he covets the most, knowledge and the sadistic pleasure of splitting heads open. His newfound title has come with governing responsibilities over fifty peasants and their silk farm. Will such responsibilities warm Burspur's cold heart? Will he be a fair lord to his subjects? Only time can tell. One thing is certain, a taste of power has only made him hunger for more.

COMMENTS

Brian Misiaszek: Thanks for your kind words. I only recently started drawing for a bit of fun, and I too love the art of early RPGs. There is more space for the imagination to fill in the gaps whilst viewing them, or something to that effect.

Re Snailflail: I was pretty interested by the prospect of characters moving across different DM's games. Something I've that was fairly common in the early days of the hobby, but has all but died out now. I think I may have actually incorrectly labeled the protocol, which was originally Flailsnail (**F**ree **L**ocation **A**nd **I**nclusion **L**aws **S**upporting **N**ew **A**nd **I**nteresting **L**eisure **S**ituations) I'm told the idea came from Jeff's gamerlog.

Jim Vassilakos: Re Alignment; One of my players did point out to me that I kind of glossed over the situation with the torture of the elf. The conversation of what to do with him went on for quite a while between the players, and the player of Taiso stated that it was righteous to destroy a worshipper of devils, and that Clerics can go to great lengths of violence for their faith. His quote, "Clerics are not parish priests who do charity tea events." His cleric was present for the torture but it was a henchman cleric who was sent away before the conversation, to save all the rigmarole of role playing that through with me.

Re Karma stat: when I was running a BX D&D campaign about three years ago, I did have a method of recording PC morality using a sliding scale. This was much easier to achieve with the Law/Chaos paradigm. In that campaign we didn't have a stable of characters, and some players were more chaotic than others, which eventually led to the whole party being dragged towards chaos. I found it slowed the game down considerably in the end, and now I generally let the players have evil parties, and good parties in their stable. The best of both worlds, I guess.

Gabriel Roark: Re ToEE: I'd love to read your play reports on this classic.

Re Wpn vs AC: I am not really opposed to the table and think it would indeed add more tactical depth. I may include it in the campaign at a later date. Currently I avoid using it to make the combats run as swiftly as possible. I do use weapon speed when there is a simultaneous initiative though.

Myles Corcoran: your cartography looks great.

Mark Nemeth: thanks. The write up encompassed about five sessions of activity. I am confident clearing the first level wouldn't have taken so long if the dice rolled a little better for them. Getting stomped by those goblins was just bad luck.

Paul Holman: Re teleportals: it would be fun to see the players map of that game!

Re infravision: I think this depends on which edition you play, new editions have 'dark vision' behave much like normal vision, but in grey scale. In AD&D creatures with infravision emit infrared rays from their own eyes, which will be "very brightly glowing red when observed by any other creature with standard infravision." (DMG pg.59). Gygax is explicit that "light must be available to make or read a map; infravision is not suitable in such circumstances." (PHB pg.102)

Patrick Zoch: I guess we don't really reconcile the campaigns not lining up. It being a fantasy world, perhaps there is a portal or something. We did have a talk about throwing my area into the Bright Desert region, but nothing has come of it so far.

Engines & Emulators: re psionics: there is talk of one of the ADDKON DMs starting a game with psionics. I hope I roll high and make a paladin for that!

Quasipseudoludognostication #3

Patrick Riley

Ignorable Theme for E&A Issue #3

What is your playing style or what do you look for in an RPG session?

I already touched on this in previous zines, but since I suggested this ignorable theme, I feel obligated to talk about it. :)

My roleplaying style is based on playacting and makebelieve. It's about being in character and speaking in character. I enjoy some aspects of engaging with the game systems, such as building characters or playing out a tactical fight, but the depths that some players go to in this regard actively turns me off.

While my in-game choices are based on "what my character would do," I try to make it constructive to the game experience and if I need to modify my choices to make the game better, I try. Of course, this requires that I recognize it in the moment. I can be quite task-focused and may bulldoze through story beats in pursuit of the goal. I also have a habit of taking my character out of the action by not pursuing reckless actions that are tangential to the goal. In other words, I'm not the one to push the big red button.

One thing I've noticed with my GMing style is in how I play NPCs. I can tell the difference between a character I find interesting and one I don't. If I find myself speaking with the NPC's voice, I'm onto a character the players may find interesting. Their "voice" refers not only to their manner of speaking, but also how they act towards and react to the PCs. Professor Farthington (see Interlude) is one example. His voice didn't come to me immediately, but once I made him an instigator of action, his character fell into place.

If I don't have a handle on the NPC's voice, then they are basically cardboard cutouts meant to fulfill a role in the plot but do not add any flavor of their own. When I'm roleplaying as the NPC, I'm much more engaged with the interaction than when I'm not. My level of enthusiasm gets fed back to the players and it leads to more interesting scenes.

Ultimately, I strive toward sessions in which everyone, including myself when I'm GMing, is in-character as often and for as long as possible.

The Adventurers Guild: Interlude

Our Protagonists

- Iggy: Rock Gnome Bard
- Chayote: Rock Gnome Cleric of Hathor
- Anan: Copper Dragonborn Fighter
- Millie: Human Wizard
- Entan: Human Druid (who missed this session)

Imprisoned at the Arcane Estates

Following Millie's abduction by an invisible stalker, the next natural step was for the PCs to rescue her. However, this would have required them breaking into the Arcane Estates which would be a suicide mission. I wanted this to be a roleplaying opportunity with Millie, but I had a good idea of how the confrontation with Isadora Voss—the woman who had Millie abducted—would go because I've been playing with Millie's player for 20 years. It would also have not advanced my greater plot goals, so I went a different route. Millie would not be interrogated by Isadora and would be interviewed by someone of greater authority.

The unseen servant delivered Millie to Arcane Estates and placed her within a study cell. The cell has a permanent antimagic field.

> You awoke upon a modest bed with simple, but clean bedding. The room is small, but comfortable. The walls and floor are gray stone. A rug with geometric patterns covers most of the floor. Against one wall is a small desk and a couple modest bookshelves are affixed to the wall above it. The desk chair is plain wood, but has a cushioned seat and armrests, though they have lost most of their volume. Though there are no windows, the air is fresh. Though there are no lamps, the room is well lit from some unknown source.

For those of who wonder how this could be in a cell with no magic... neveryoumind.

> The door seems to be made of sturdy hardwood with thick steel hinges and handle. You were woken by the heavy thunk of the doorlock. The door handle turns gently and the door begins to open.

I paused to give Millie an opportunity to react. She chose to simply sit up in the bed and wait.

A mature human man walks through the door. He wears robes of blue with gold trim. Thin gray hair can be seen poking out from under his blue cap. He wears a silver pendant that you recognize as the eye of the Cult of Englightenment. He carries a rectangular basket in two hands and the door closes behind him, pulled shut by some unseen hand. "Miss Weaver," he says as he sets the basket upon the desk. *"My name is Helmut Guardeax. I am one of the directors on the Arcane Estate's board, and I am very curious to know why you are here."* He pulled out a tall ceramic cup from the basket and hands it to you. *"This is just herbal tea. It will help with the headache you are probably just now realizing you have."*

Millie woke with 1 hit point and a headache. The tea is weak with just a whisper of sweetiness, but it pleasant and soothing.

Helmut removes various items from the basket which you soon realize are the items you had on your person when you were abducted, including some that were in your bag of holding. This includes all the candles. Most importantly, you recognize your spellbook which he sets upon his lap once he turns the desk chair to face you and takes a seat.

Depending on Millie's questions, Helmut offers the following information. I wrote out these answers ahead of time, but Millie didn't ask many straight-forward questions. However, I was able to weave the info-dump into the conversation.

"Miss Voss overreached her authority. Moreover, she lied to me. See, I was led to believe that she had the candle—my candle—in her possession after her father's passing. I was led to believe that she was continuing the investigation that her father had been doing. Instead, I learn that she had lost it—allowed it to become misplaced through no fault of the household staff—and went through extraordinary measures to retrieve it. Completely unnecessary, but indicative of her vainglorious character."

"Though a ceremonial title, the Protector of the Arcane Estates still comes with some administrative privileges and obligations. Combined with her political savvy, Isadora holds not insignificant authority within these halls."

"Yes, I have read through your spellbook. I apologize for the intrusion, but my curiosity got the better of my manners. I understand you had no formal apprenticeship or tutelage?" He nods and gives a respectful grin. *"I am impressed. It's rough—lacking the academic formalisms one would expect from a traditionally trained wizard—but I see the talent and intellect on the page."* He hands over your spellbook. *"I have made some notes for you that might help you in your arcane journey."*

"The candle is a mystery. Or rather, it is a mystery of a mystery. You know of the dikaryans? How we have been completely unable to read their writing despite all magics applied to the task? Any wizard capable of casting a most basic spell should be able to comprehend this language, and yet they cannot. After many years of research and prayer, I created a candle such that any text illuminated by its light would become readable. And yet, the candle refused to be lit. It is as if the universe itself is denying its knowledge to be known." He takes a moment to calm his exasperation. "*I lent it to Edmund Voss, in the hopes that he would be able to unlock its mystery, but he too failed. And now I doubt that Isadora ever tried. Tell me, Miss Weaver, have you studied it?"*

"You are free to go when you feel rested enough to leave. My assistant Dunkirk will escort you when you are ready. I placed some curatives in your satchel but do not consume them until you step into the hallway." He slowly rises from his chair and steps to the door. As he grabs the handle, he turns and says, *"You will not be bothered by Isadora in the future. Well, I honestly cannot promise that. What I can promise is that the Arcane Estates will not be part of it."*

Dunkirk hands Millie her bag of holding once she steps out of the cell. Dunkirk is a halfling-sized squid that floats in the air with its tentacles pointed generally downward. Though Dunkirk understands all spoken languages, it cannot speak, but its tentacles can be quite expressive. It propels itself by undulating its fins.

Helmut gifted Millie with the following:

- Spell Scroll of See Invisibility
- Spell Scroll of Augury
- Spell Scroll of Comprehend Languages
- 2 Potions of Healing (greater): 4d4 + 4

The spell scrolls were tucked into the pages of her spellbook. Later that day, she was able to successfully translate them into her spellbook.

For some, this may have seemed anticlimactic, but everyone enjoyed it and came away liking Helmut.

Meanwhile…

Despite losing their comrade, Iggy pronounced victory to the folks coming out from their hiding places in alleyways and under and behind market stalls. The crowd responded with "applause and hurrahs "and lifted the PCs into the air onto their shoulders in celebration.[1]

After some deliberation and begrudging acceptance that they could not follow where she went because entity flew off in a direct path away from Iggy (thanks to the spell he cast)—a direction that had no correlation to the direction it would take her—they decided to visit the Arcane Estate to determine if Millie was taken there. They were stopped at the gate by the guards wanting to know their business. The Arcane Estate is a place of arcane study that only grants entrance to members or those with business with members. The players were stymied until I reminded them that they had done a quest to rescue a librarian at the Estate from the clutches of wererats.[2] Once they dropped the name, Lucius was summoned by the guards, and he brought them inside. He led them to a group study room where they could discuss openly without disturbing the other library users.

The PCs did some studying of elementals while Lucius asked around about Millie. He had never met Millie (the player was not available for that quest), but he did confirm that someone matching her description had been taken to the dungeon. Chayote, being a bit of a sage herself, was able to identify their assailants as mephits and an invisible stalker.

Helmut also invited Millie to come back and visit the library, essentially giving her adjunct membership into the Estate. Upon being escorted out by Dunkirk, she asked to be taken to the library (an example of the player knowing what was best for the story while staying completely in character). And so as others left the study room, the entire group was reunited in the library.

[1] Easy to do with the 2 gnomes, not so much with the armored dragonborn.

[2] Loosely based on the *Death in Skullport* adventure.

Interlude of the Interlude

With Entan's player gone, I didn't want to start anything big, so I gave the players time to faff about. In-game, they had 3 days before the next set of quests were to be posted.

A particular aspect of D&D5e is that there are no costs associated with magic items. I translated this in my world to there being no magic shops. Yes, magic items could be traded, but this involved bartering and brokering. If you wanted a particular item, you would have to find someone who had it and then negotiate a trade. This might involve multiple parties. This could also be for services and thus lead to quests for the PCs to undertake.

As part of the loot from a previous adventure, the PCs had in their possession a magical rapier. Anan was the only one with proficiency to use it,[3] but he was a polearm expert. However, they could never decide what item they might want in exchange. It was finally decided that Anan would get a glaive that could cast fog cloud. He already had 3 other polearms, including a +1 spear, but whatever. Where he puts them, I don't want to think about.

The glaive has a shaft of dark wood carved with designs of clouds and wind, revealed in a lighter shade. The blade is similarly adorned. When swung, a thin wisp of fog trails behind the tip (has no in-game effect). When the command word is spoken, the user can generate a fog cloud that emanates from the blade.

Millie experimented a bit with the candle. She went along the lines of trying things that would normally put a candle out, but none of these worked. As the GM, I know the secret. It doesn't require a secret word or anything that the player would not figure out on their own. It is discoverable through just trying stuff and I let the players know this.

Chayote wanted to improve over her hide armor. She wanted mail woven from bones. I am really trying to be accommodating, but this was a bit silly. She could afford a breast plate that would give better protection. I offered her a breastplate crafted from fused rib bones of some unspecified beasts and she was happy with that suggestion.

Iggy didn't have anything interesting to do.

[3] I had thought that all bards were proficient in rapiers, but I was misremembering from previous editions.

Unfortunately, this didn't burn enough time to fill up the session, so I had them pick and start their next quest. I already had an idea of how to get Entan back with the group if they left town. They studied the quest postings (see below) and chose the archaeological expedition (as they are only Bronze rank at this juncture; they will be promoted to Silver when they reach 5th level).

Bronze Quests — 1737 Ascending Summer 11

Bodyguard duty for an alchemist going to the southern marshlands: 50 gp plus reasonable expenses per member

Assist and provide guard duty for an archaeological expedition east of Beron: 10gp per member per day, expenses paid.

Deliver message to Syraton and return: 250gp flat fee per member.

Investigate monster sightings to the west: 50-200 gp per member, depending on outcome.

Adventurers Guild recruitment drive: free drinks, guildhall credits per new recruit, no pay.

Silver Quests

Join diplomatic mission to Dalven.

Investigate possible new portal opening in Rift Mountains.

Guard duty for merchant vessels sailing down Orlin to Dun Bay.

Gold Quests

The Ilmar river has been blocked somewhere between Shernville and Abnath. Fix it.

Stop the King of Etherwind. *Apparently, giving him that sword was a BAD IDEA.*

Map new overland route to the Cape of the Southern Wind.

Platinum Quests

The Gray Witch issue has gotten out of hand.

Kill dragon destroying ships sailing through Keys Islands.

Locate three/ lost expeditions headed to Gheist Glacier in the Estern Mountains.

Diamond Quests

A new island has appeared off the Amethyst coast. Figure out what that's all about.

Destroy great worm still hunting in the Kordan Wastes.

Archaeological Quest

Professor Farthington

The PCs met him in his half-basement curio shop. He is a halfling with a severely receding hairline and huge bushy mutton chops. He told them of his expedition to a site where a hill has eroded and exposed an ancient structure. Their role would be to deal with any threats that emerged. Millie asked whether any of his finds animated when we assembled them and when he excitedly replied, "Yes!" she became excited for the adventure.

The professor had 3 wagons pulled by 6 donkeys and 20 hired workers for the expedition. On the first day out from Islingford, the PCs felt a hot wind uncharacteristic of the region and saw grains of sand being blown through the grassland. They fretted over whether or not to investigate, but their patron made up their minds for them by marching confidently upwind. They eventually came across sand dunes and a dimensional rift hundreds of yards wide and tall beyond which was a boundless desert. The glowing edge of the rift was like torn power and arched like an eerie rainbow. Moments after they reached the border of the rift, three giant scorpions emerged from the sand defending their (new) territory and/or looking for a meal!

The world is riddled with rifts such as this. They appear and disappear randomly. Most are small—just large enough to let monsters through—and do not have the well-defined edges that this rift has. In fact, all the peoples of the world arrived through a rift, bringing their cultures and languages. The dikaryans referenced by Helmut Guardeax are the world's original inhabitants but only their ruins, scattered artifacts, and indecipherable writings are left. At some point in the past, a great catastrophe brought ruin upon them and dropped the world into chaos. It took many hundreds of years before civilization could gain a foothold some 1700 years ago (note date above).

The rifts provide me with a convenient excuse to introduce monsters anywhere and anytime without worrying about ecology. Plus, they represent a destabilizing factor that prevents large empires from forming. All politics are local. As the PCs gain levels, the rifts probably will become more of a prominent component in the campaign—and the destiny of a particular PC.

Where was I?

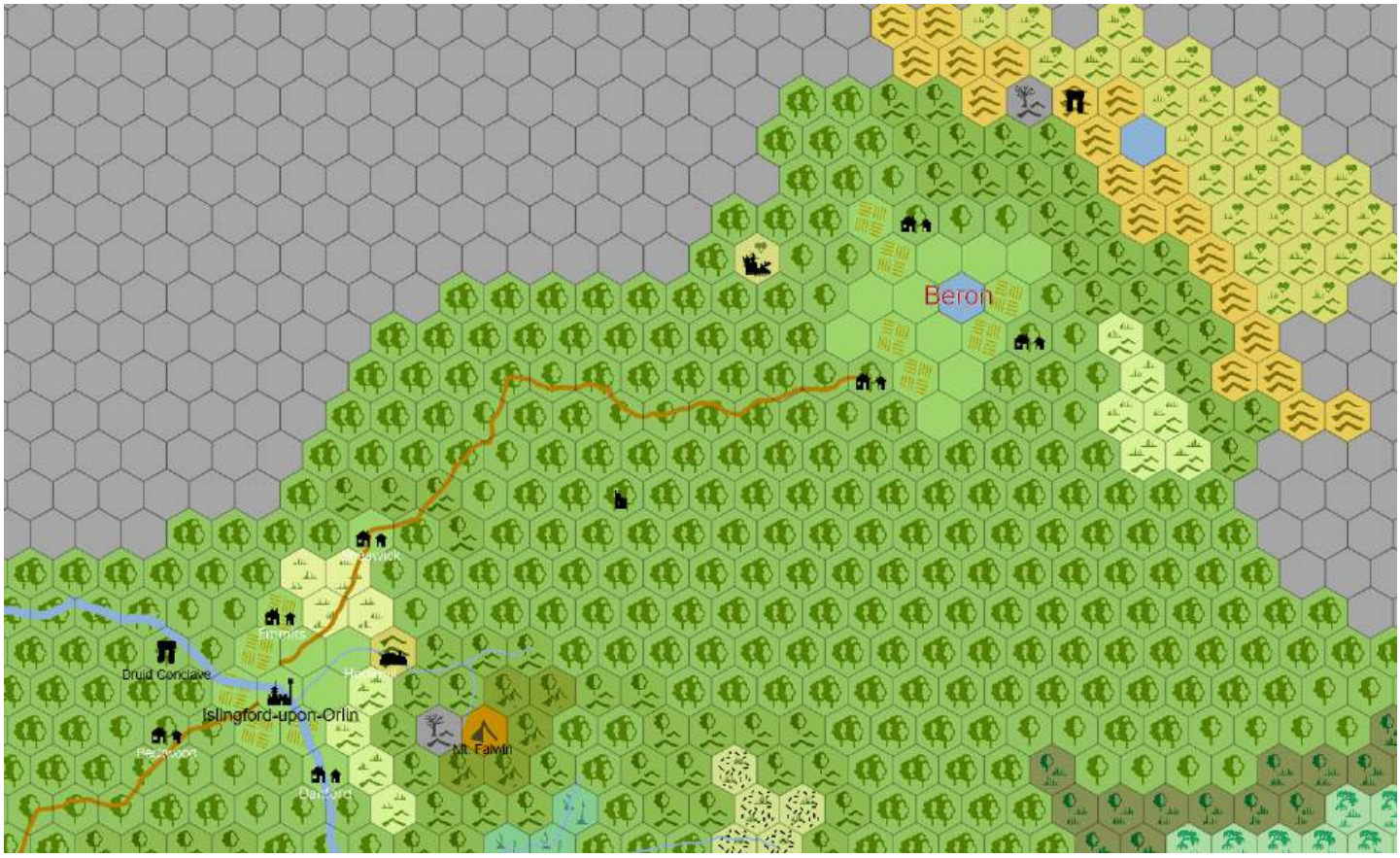
Anan positioned himself between the scorpions and the rest of the party. With the spellcasters casting spells from range (for an abjurer, Millie casts a magic missile *a lot*), one of the monsters fell while only scratching the dragonborn warrior. As they focused their attention on their next target, Professor Farthington took the opportunity to step forward and start retrieving the felled scorpion stinger for his collection. This caused Anan no end of consternation, but perhaps some respect from the rest of the party. This reached a height when Professor Farthington, now completing his task, dealt the death blow to the second skeleton and the party cheered.

Unfortunately, by now Iggy had been severely injured and was on death's door. The final scorpion, still holding Iggy in its claw, headed toward the rift, moving at top speed. Anan spurred his horse to charge and lanced it with his spear. A timely dose of heath potion revived Iggy before he could take his final breath.

Some of you may notice parallels between Roland Stansbury, the young noble the PCs escorted on a hunt, and Professor Farthington. This is unfortunate as I don't like repeating myself even if the PCs chose similar escort quests. However, Roland was more along for the ride and lacked a distinct personality whereas Professor Farthington is in charge of the expedition and can push the PCs toward the plot. Similarly, having the scorpion retreat while holding a PC paralleled Millie's earlier plight, but ::shrug::.

Returning to the road and continuing their journey, they ran into a number of obstinate wild boars blocking the road. The PCs went out of their way to not kill them and instead Anan provoked them into a chase that lured them away from the road.

I had rolled this encounter on a random table, but I also pulled from personal experience where we have wild pigs roaming the suburbs. They have learned how to topple garbage cans and then spread trash over the street and lawns as they rummage for food. I had adopted a routine of taking the cans to the curb in the early morning rather than the night before, but last week that tactic failed us as the pigs descended in the 2-hour window before trash pickup came. My wife tried to deter them with her paintball air pistol she uses against the racoons, but wild pigs are heartier than your standard trash panda, and they just gave her an annoyed glance. A neighbor even struck one with a wood plank to minimal effect.



Scale is 6 miles per hex, edge-to-edge. The gray hexes represent blank areas I haven't filled in yet

The Kidnapping of Entan

Entan's player had missed several sessions, I had two tasks in front of me. 1) Determine what he had been doing while the other party members were undertaking quests. 2) Get him synced up with the rest of the group who had already left town.

For the first part, I asked the player to describe what Entan had been doing. He described that Entan had been ambushed and locked in a dungeon cell with a hood over his head for nearly two weeks. He never saw his assailants, but from what he gathered from overhearing their conversations is that they were trying to kidnap and ransom a "druid royal." Entan thinks it was a case of mistaken identity because they never got their ransom and let Entan go. He tried to report his ordeal to the city watch but with nothing to go on with no description other than, "one of them had a deep voice," there was nothing they could do.

What I determined was that Entan was partially mistaken. Based on his background, his family is as close to "druidic royalty" as is meaningful and his kidnappers did get the right person. Entan turned his back on his family when he left for Islingford and a life of adventure. As such, they did not capitulate to the kidnappers demands. I have not determined who the kidnappers or what their demands were, but I know they were not so ruthless as to kill Entan when their demands were not met.

I manipulated the timing such that Entan was freed in time for him to catch up with the group once he figured out where they went. I also wanted to set something else up and had contingencies depending on if Entan was in the city or the wilderness.

> Entan was minding his own business in the guildhall when he felt a presence behind him. Just as he turned to look, he heard something sniffing at his neck tickling his hairs. "You smell like city," Skyla said as he locked eyes with the wood elf mere inches from his face. She stared at him with a disapproving snarl—well, more disapproving than her normal snarl.

Skyla doesn't like talking and instead uses grunts, growls, facial expression, and body language to communicate. She wants to show Entan that the world is broken—that it needs healing—as evidenced by the rifts. In her mind, Entan needs to be shown so that he could see. Trying to convince him of this fate is

pointless. In her eyes, he has already strayed from the path and been corrupted (for lack of a better term) by the city. She hates being in the city and thinks, rightly or wrongly, that he should feel the same.

She walks to the guildhouse door where she pauses and glanced back to confirm that Entan is following her.

Fortunately, he did, but I had a plan if he didn't.

Skyla leads you first to the edge of town and then across the surrounding farmland, not following any established road or trail.

She led him to the desert portal and three dead giant scorpion husks. She pointed to the portal and said, "Fix it." What she really should have said was, "*Heal* it," but I didn't want to give up the game just yet and her limited vocabulary (at least in Common) gave me an excuse. Of course, he couldn't do anything about the portal.

In general, Entan is a terrible druid. His survival skills are poor and Skyla (a ranger) has no respect for him. She did her duty by pointing out the problem—the rifts are open wounds in the world—but cannot force him to care. Disgusted, she pointed in the direction of Sheawick where he could eventually catch up with the party.

The Road to Beron

You spent the first night of your journey near the village of Sheawick. A few of the hirelings took the opportunity to visit the local public house and pick up last-minute supplies. Professor Farthington stayed with the wagons and the rest of the crew, spending time cleaning up and preserving the scorpion stingers.

The road out of Sheawick is in poor condition and the donkeys struggled on some of the hills, requiring additional help to push the supply-laiden wagons forward. Going was slow on the one lane dirt road with ruts, rocks, and leaf litter, but it made looking out for dangers in the dense woodland easier. Most of the journey was made in the shadow of the woods that sheltered you from the early summer heat, but it also made the nights and foreboding with little moonlight. The crew gathered around multiple campfires, sang songs, and played games to ward off their fear of what might lurk in the deep, dark woods.

In mid-afternoon on the third day, the road is blocked by a draft horse, lying dead in the road, still attached to an overturned wagon. Both show signs of scavenging—not even the flies are interested any more. Broken clay vessels, small wood barrels, and rotting melon rinds are scattered about.

The wagon belonged to Greff Milbrecht, a widower farmer from Beron who mostly kept to himself but was respected in the community. He was taking his early summer crop to Islingford to sell but was waylaid and attacked by the oni who occupies Cowle Keep. This was 4 days before the party's arrival.

Investigation of the scene will not provide scant details. Among the debris from the wagon is a torn canvas pack holding a couple sets of men's clothing, a lantern, a couple vials of lamp oil, a couple coils of rope (now not so neatly coiled), and other traveling supplies. Any and all foodstuffs have been consumed, except for a small barrel of small beer that rolled off the side of the road and remains sealed.

A Wisdom (Medicine) check will reveal that the horse's wounds were from scavengers post mortem (DC 15) and it probably died of fright (DC 20). There are no signs of the wagon driver—no blood or signs of a struggle. An Intelligence (Perception) check of DC 15 will find two sets of medium humanoid tracks leading away from the scene into the forest to the south. There are no tracks leading to the scene.

A Wisdom (Survival) check of DC 20 is required to follow the tracks through the woods. After many miles, the spire of Cowle Keep will come into view. However, Professor Farthington will not let it get that far. There is nothing of potential interest in this "side quest" (as he would call it) and will want to move on once it is evident that there is no immediate danger or opportunity. I'm just setting up the "side quest" for their return journey.[4]

After a couple more days of travel, you reach the outskirts of Beron. Professor Farthington explains, *"According to my research, Beron is the name of a region surrounding a small lake fed by an underground spring. Independent farms dot the area and some have clustered together in what you might call hamlets, but they have no formal name or central government. The soil is poorer than around Islingford-upon-Orlin though it is criss-crossed by small creeks and agricultural canals fed by the spring. There is little trade and little reason for anyone to come here."*

[4] See my comments to Patrick Zoch on the last page.

You arrive at the hamlet and a quaint pub that appears to just be an extension of someone's house. There is not enough room to fit everyone, but Professor Farthington makes sure that drinks and food are brought outside as well. The proprietor, her husband, and three children do their best to accommodate you all. Professor Farthington asks permission to camp on the edge of their fields and passes them some additional gold which they are more than happy to accept.

There really is not much to do or see here, but if there is anything that the PCs want to do, they can do it now. Professor Farthington has no need for the PCs' services at this time.

There are no dedicated shops or businesses here. Any services, such as making clothes or smithing, are done out of people's houses and performed individually or collectively among multiple households.[5] The folk are generally friendly once they realize that the outsiders are not a threat and that they have gold to spend. They will answer the PCs' questions, but also have questions of their own about the outside world, Islingford, and the PCs' adventures.

No one on this side of Beron knows about the archaeological site Professor Farthington is heading to. They had heard that someone had discovered some ruins in the eastern hills, but they don't know the details. The general consensus is that they should be left alone, but they will not begrudge Professor Farthington or the PCs for wanting to explore them.

The grassland surrounding the spring is not used for farming and is populated with wildflowers and the giant bees that pollinate them. Occasionally, "one of the yellow ladies," as the people call them, will wander into a farm but will eventually go off on its own if undisturbed. Should anyone be foolish enough to test their courage, such as by poking or lassoing a bee, it does not end well for them.

The PCs heard about the "yellow ladies," and so were forewarned for their next encounter…

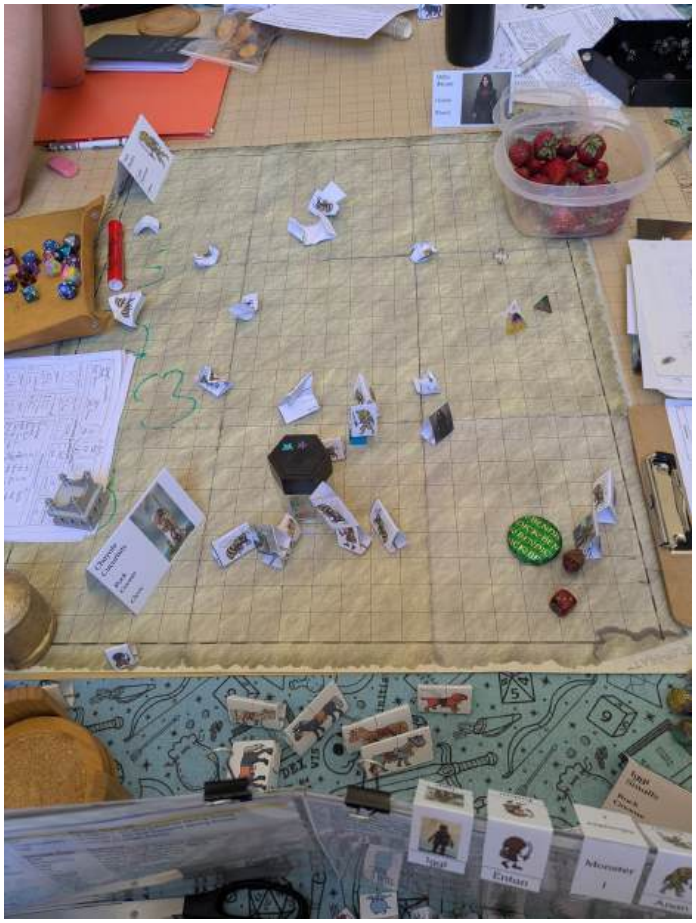
[5] "So a proper village-village," I think one of the players said.

The Yellow Ladies

The next day, Professor Farthington will be eager to get an early start and reach the next hamlet before nightfall. Fortunately, the path skirts the border between the woods and fields and is relatively flat and not as bad as the road that led to Beron, allowing the wagons to maintain a normal pace. Unfortunately, they have an encounter with the yellow ladies.

The bees are milling about the area and are in some distress. A fungal infection has caused a disruption in their normal foraging behavior. The party will spot the bees, some of which are hovering close to the ground, from about 120' away.

I appreciate the guidance D&D provides on how to scale an encounter based on the PCs' levels. It's fundamentally flawed since there is a huge difference between a single 5th-level PC and 5 1st-level PCs, but the guidance treats them as equivalent. As the PCs cross over from 4th to 5th level, I don't want to just crank up the Challenge Rating (CR) of the monsters. I wondered, what would happen if I threw a bunch of low-CR creatures at them, specifically, 18 CR ½ (100 xp) giant wasps (reskinned as bees)?



This was the view from behind my GM screen.[6] The upside down dice container and the green peppermint patty represented area effect spells (moonbeam and cloud of daggers, respectively). The strawberries were just strawberries. :)

The encounter was pretty challenging and a bit gruelling as each PC was swarmed[7] by multiple bees. As seen in the picture, Entan had one hover over his head and attack him from there (where it was safe from the moonbeam). At 22 hit points, the bees required 2-3 hits to kill, so to help track their damage, I had the players write the damage on∂ the paper miniatures. As the bees were killed, I crumpled them up and left them on the battlemap.

The Dig Site

Upon reaching the next thorpe, Professor Farthington found the local man who had discovered the cave and had him lead the party to the site. It was located in a hilly region and on one particular hill, erosion had exposed a structure of smooth gray stone and undercut a cave. The stone was smooth and without signs of masonry, as if the rock had been molded into shape.

The crew set up a campsite while the PCs scouted the area. The hill was lush with grass, bushes, and wildflowers of white, yellow, and pink. There were no signs of any potential threats, but they established a watch schedule nonetheless.

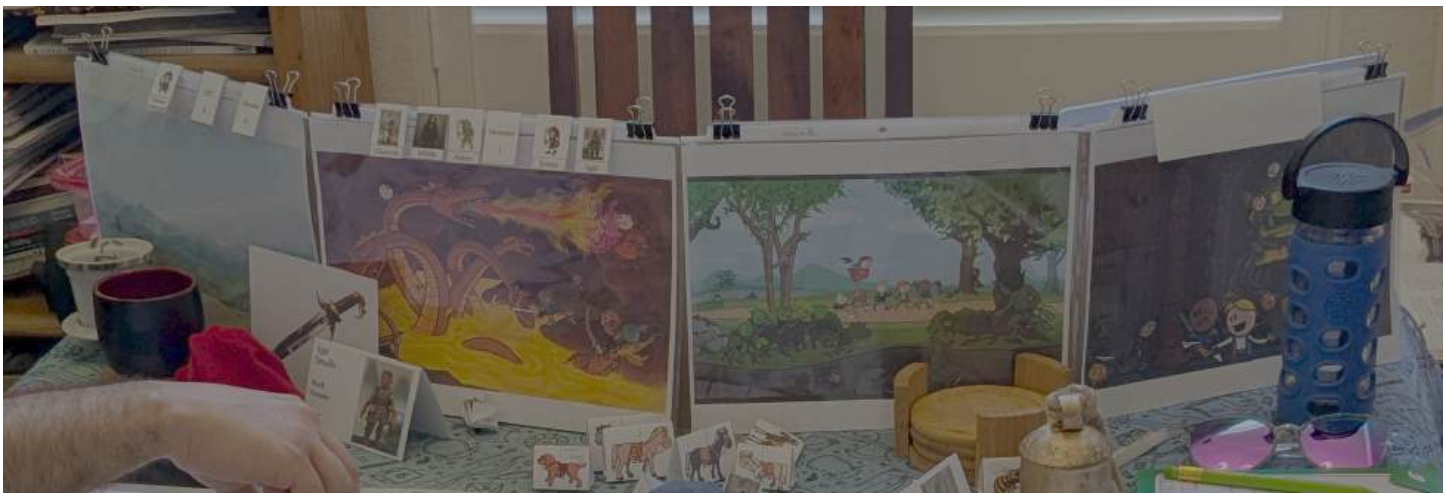
On Entan's watch, he was overcome by the thick, musky smell of the flowers that gave him a headache. In reality, he had been attacked but he made his saving throw and did not know exactly what happened. During her watch, Chayote noted that some of the crew walked away from camp only to return a few minutes later. Though guessing this was just nature taking its course, she kept track and noted when someone failed to return. Investigating, she discovered a dead body.

Upon returning to camp, she woke the party. Entan and Millie decided to stay back and guard the camp while the others went off to investigate. A flowering bush lashed out at Anon. After backing away, he declared, "Good thing they can't move." Just then, it moved (slowly) toward him. And two others. Once they realized they could easily stay at range and that it required fire to prevent the plants from instantly regrowing, they were able to stop the immediate threat.

They spent the next day hunting for and removing similar bushes.

The First Delve

Once the crew had broken through and created a small tunnel into the complex, our heroes and Professor Farthington[8] entered an underground complex that had been cut off from the surface world for a couple thousand years. Little did they know that it was home to a being much, much older than that.[9]



[6] My table is 42" (106.68cm) wide which is wider than most tables, but we are still crunched for space.

[7] Bee-lieve me, the most challenging part of the encounter was surviving all the puns.

[8] Yes, I always write his name in full like that every time, even in my notes.

[9] And Anon's player forgot that a 5th level dragonborn can fly. Hilarity ensued.

Comments on E&A Issue #2

Dylan Capel

I hope that E&A being free does not dissuade you from continuing to contribute.

The primary magic lantern I want is one that floats on its own. It doesn't need to hold any additional weight beyond a light tether so that one can use it hands-free.

Myles Corcoran

Good to see you again (sorry I missed saying this last issue).

For E&A, I decided to go with PC names only as a matter of privacy/anonymity given that E&A is (or will be) more publicly accessible than A&E was. Plus, always referring to Millie's player as "Millie's player" rather than "T——" puts less burden on the reader to remember (or reference) which player is playing which PC.

RYCT Gabriel, I had originally planned to use level milestones for The Adventurers Guild campaign, but the players wanted to use experience points. I haven't found it a burden. There is asymmetry among the PCs as absences and xp awarded for campaign contributions created a spread of xp totals. They are still within a level of each other (4th and 5th as of this writing). Entan's player misses the most sessions. He's the youngest, has the most active social life, and travels a lot. I'll start worrying if Entan ever falls behind by 2 levels.

Timothy Collinson

Thanks for catching my typo. The missing chapter (stolen by the Cult of Tiamat) was to lead the PCs to the professor who could give them an info dump and means of finding the Cult of Tiamat under The City.

Too often, more capable PCs get more attention than less capable ones. I have found that playing second-fiddle PCs tends to be less fun in the long run. Mostly, I also cannot escape the sense of unfairness when I get shafted by the dice.

Michael Cule

If the Son is the soldier, I would have made the Father the protector. Uncle is good, but doesn't sound old enough.[10] I envision more of an Old Coot. If you stick with Uncle, I think Crone should be replaced by Auntie.

[10] TPPoE&A: This is a self-affirmed author insert. Be nice.

Your sentiment about running Spider Meat at Stabcon is exactly what I'm talking about to Lisa and Heath.

> The elves call it "The Shining City." It is known as "Fullerton" to the gnomes. The orcs referred to it as "The Prize" before calling it home. "Riverhenge." "Agatha's Jewel." "Warren 19-2." "City of Ghosts." "Osterun." The City of 1000 Names has (and had) as many names as the number of races to have called it home over the ages. Its origin—and its original name—has been lost to time. Over the centuries, it has been shaped by trade and expanded by immigrants, blessed by the gods and razed by earthquakes, bolstered by empires and burned by invaders, and each successive generation builds upon the ruins of the last. The Undercity is a chaotic mix of ruins, buried remnants of the past. It is the home of the kobolds, many goblins, some dwarves, and unknown monsters. The City has 1000 languages, 1000 races, 1000 histories, 1000 names.

Brian Christopher Misiaszek

RAE the rabbit hole on the ouster of Gerardo Machado. Following that history dump, it was difficult to tell where the background for *El Fantasma of El Capitolio* and the other scenarios diverged from our recorded history. I don't know how one would denote these divergences while maintaining the flow of the text.

Mark Nemeth

Thanks for the Daggerheart review. The good thing about initiative systems is that they are generally pretty easy to tweak or swap out entirely.[11] Swapping between PC turns and opposition turns is a good idea, and other RPGs have done this, but I would not want to give everyone on both sides an equal opportunity to act. I trust that the players would figure out their side to play fair and the GM can always choose to play optimally or sub-optimally based on the situation. With that mindset, I can see how the initiative can work well, but I can also see how it would grate against more simulationist and "old school" sensibilities.

In general, I have the same reaction to having so many playable character species as you and your GM. The City of 1000 Names was specifically intended to break me free of my usual preferences[12] and embrace the kitchen-sink aesthetic. It helped that *Savage Worlds*

[11] My favorite is *Savage Worlds*.

[12] I'd be perfectly happy with no species beyond humans.

makes it easy to give species distinct abilities and flaws. It helps that I and the players only created species that felt different from another.

RYCT me, all my examples of a god were allusions to biblical passages or modern Christian beliefs. Sorry.

Who gets to say what God commands? This is a serious question. Everyone has different ideas of what God commands even while reading the exact same text. I would find the whole thing amusing if certain people didn't use their claims about what God commands as an excuse to be shitty to other people (and put it into law). And/or to call for the replacement of our pluralistic republic with a Christian theocracy.[13] And/or rewind a couple centuries of scientific knowledge in the fields of geology, biology, cosmology,....

Ring Shout sounds like it could be a great movie or streaming miniseries following the success of *Lovecraft Country* and *Sinners*. The set designers and fight choreographers could make up for the author's descriptive shortcomings.

As not the target audience of *Ripeness*, what made you pick it up?

Lisa Padol

The problem I've run into with traditional, tetrahedral d4s isn't that they're caltrops, but that they can be tricky to pick up as they have a tendency to squirt out from your fingertips.

RYCT Mark retelling Aviatrix's experience with a PC who pulled an NPC into troubles rather than the NPC pulling the PC out, I was immediately reminded of the scene from *Fatso* (iirc) in which the Dom Deluise lead called in his sponsors from Eaters Anonymous and instead of helping him through his problems, the 3 of them ended up in a binge eating marathon.

Your reasoning to me about running published scenarios at a con are indisputable. I admit it is a "me problem." Even so, mentioning it in the description would be nice. Many scenario descriptions can sound similar, so if you had played the scenario with a different GM, you would know to avoid the game. Several years ago when Todd Furler ran a sequence of Unknown Armies games he had run at previous cons, he noted as such in the description so that he wouldn't get players who had played it before (but may not have remembered they had). See also my comments to Health.

Thanks for the edit. All too often, I neglect to add the "not"s in my writing and end up conveying the exact opposite of what I'm intending!

In The City of 1000 Names, gnoll thralls are male gnolls. Gnoll culture is hyper matriarchal and misandrous. It's just one of those setting details that didn't make it into the scenario description. I don't know what would have happened at the game table if there was a dispute about the goblin PCs joining. It would have mostly depended upon how the PCs approached it. When I ran it, the PCs ignored it.

Pum

Thanks for the link to the sand battery. I wonder about the efficiency and what the unintended side effects of the battery will turn out to be.

John Redden

You have my shared anger regarding the invasion of your farm. Do you wish you could have been at home when it occurred? At the risk of spreading ICE anecdotes, our housekeeper's son was selling strawberries (a common site on suburban street corners here) and was asked by ICE to show his papers. He's Mexican-American and a U.S. citizen. His two white friends with him were not asked.

Brian Rogers

Good to see you again.

I'm sure you could pull off playing The Eye quite well, but it reminds me of how some players will create an astral projecting hero so that they are never in physical danger.

What does it say about me that I was grooving on the notion of having a displacer beast familiar who doesn't particularly like you?

Heath Row

When it comes to convention games, I find running a scenario that someone would buy and run/play outside the con as "cheating" or maybe laziness. I don't have a good justification for this and it really doesn't upset me, but I prefer to play in "original" scenarios. As a GM (and perhaps egotistically), I want to give players something

[13] Forgetting that there are thousands of Christian denominations who disagree on what it means to even be a Christian.

they couldn't literally buy off the shelf. Instead, I want to offer local, artisanal, small batch roleplaying experiences. :)

The only time it really irked me was when someone ran the *Unknown Armies* scenario *Jailbreak*. It is designed, I believe, as a 2-hour demo game. This guy reserved a 6- or 8-hour game slot for it. It took us 90 minutes to reach the end. GMs who run a minimum number of hours or player-hours get free admission into the con. I think this GM was cheating the system. I've seen the same event advertised for several years.

Clark Timmins

When you say that politically incorrect orcs no longer exist in the game, what do you mean? Why switch to goblins and not just use 5e orcs? If you mean there is no entry for "orc" in the Monster Manual, what you're supposed to do is pick an entry like "Tough" or "Bandit" and make it an orc, applying traits (Adrenaline Rush, Darkvision, and Relentless Endurance) as you see fit.

Did you use Dungeon Map Doodler for the maps?

Mark A. Wilson

The monk class is odd. From their inclusion in AD&D 1e, they didn't really fit the aesthetic of the other classes. Mechanically, they probably have always been "weak" and relied more on those aesthetics than mechanical robustness. I still think it's true in 5e, but damn if I'm not attracted to them. I do wish there was a viable way to create an unarmed fighter without the mystical trappings of the monk class.

Jim Vassilakos

RYCT Attronarch about alignments, since we are talking about a fantasy world, adding in Good and Evil plus Law and Chaos as fundamental forces in the universe can be fun to play around with. In AD&D 1e, Protection from Evil provided real protection from attacks and spells originating from evil (or good, if reversed) creatures. So the concept of alignment had to exist as a measurable quality. In 5e, the protection only applies to certain types of creature (which 1e also did), but not its alignment.

RYCT Mitch, "all those mundane details still need to be fleshed out in the course of the writing" when making your own setting. The difficulty I have is that there is no "writing." I need the details during play and I'm not going to stop play to figure them out (or read up on them). This results in either making stuff up on the fly (which can be fun) or simply ignoring it (which is much more common). With published settings, I never internalize it to the point where I can pull up the mundane details on the fly and I either make something up (which may be noncanonical) or simply ignore it.

RYCT Mitch on the origins of the word "Chrome," you shouldn't do etymology on fantasy worlds. Do you think the cartographers wrote in English? Does the world have an ancient Greece from which the word derives? Do you know what "Chrome Sea" means? They could be using that sequence of letters for something completely different than what modern English speakers do. Personally, I would have gone with Silvery Sea because it's alliterative.

RYCT Gabriel re AD&D levels, druids had to be very aware of their level and bards had strict level requirements in their progression to becoming a bard. I have been tempted to run a game using the conventions of LitRPG. The Adventurers Guild does a tiny amount with its ranking system tied to character level.

Patrick Zoch

Dyson Logos is da bomb. Cowle Keep looks good. I think I'll use it in the campaign game soon. The stumpy tower symbol just left of center of the map above is where I put it. I think it is occupied by an ~~ogre mage~~ oni.

The secondary stair on the first floor was a bit hard to find. Directional arrows on stairs are useful (and really mattered if a stair was clockwise or counterclockwise in castle defense).

As much as I like pretty maps, I lament that it isn't always easy to share them with the players. It's a little easier for online play where you can load the image file as the battlemap, but for tabletop play, it can be a pain to print them out. If I just copy them by hand onto my erasable battlemap, it loses all its charm.

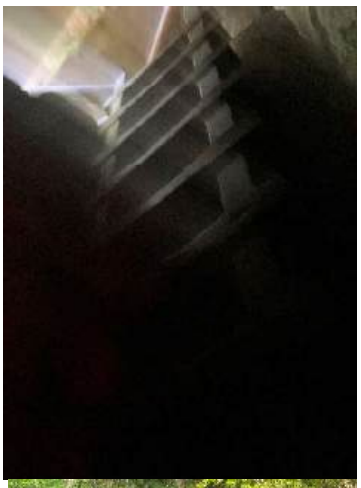
With A&E, I tried to be conscientious of readers of printed copies which was the default mode folks used the vast majority of its lifetime. Since E&A is a purely digital distribution, I don't worry about how it would look printed[14] and I can play with color.

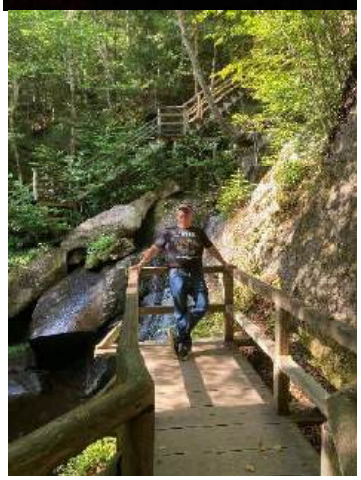
[14] Those who print their copies of E&A are on their own (and I'm curious to know if anyone is).

DENIZENS OF THE LIBRARY #2

A 'zine for Ever & Anon, copyright 2025 by Brian Rogers

All About Me





August flew by, with work and family vacations. The bi-annual trip to New Hampshire went well, and which I didn't get to do everything we wanted to, I did get to read 5 books. So that's something. One stand out was we went to Lost River Gorge in Woodstock, NH, which I strongly recommend. It's a mile walk with 1,100 stairs on the back half of it taking you from the bottom to the top of the titular gorge. Along the way are a dozen caves – none of them terribly big – that you can climb, crawl and slither through, clearly marked with platforms. My daughter referred to it as "spelunking on easy mode", but it still gives you the sense of being subterranean and the kinds of things your fantasy RPG hero might do.

We have, through a series of happy accidents, finally discovered the joy of *Ticket to Ride*: My wife (who did say to extend her love to everyone from the old A&E days) is not a natural board game player but she took to this effortlessly. Likely to play several more games before our daughter returns to college. If anyone with board game experience can recommend things of similar style and complexity I would appreciate it. My daughter and I have been enjoying *Forbidden Jungle*, which ramps up the complexity of *Forbidden Island* a bit but remains very playable. She is taking our copy off to college to be a room game for her and her friends.

Inside the Library

We have just finished the summer session at the library: since during the summer the kids have much more erratic schedules rather than try to keep either regular game going I switch to a weekly *Knave* game built around The Dyson Megadelve, where Dyson Logos had made all the maps, explained the internal logic, and made two 'drop charts' for random encounters. That was just the right amount of framework for me to add my own ideas without having to start from scratch and really give the kids a dungeon crawl experience. I wrote up descriptions for spaces on the map and explain to myself what was going on, had the players make PCs (we had 8 players at the first session, which Knave can handle) and charged.

Two things to know about the Megadelve are the easiest entry point is through a giant mushroom cave that every local group uses as a food source, including the starting town, and inside it there is a "Mushroom King", which in *Knave* terms is a small god the PCs could worship (the locals speak of the Mushroom King in hushed rumors) and somewhere in the mushroom cave is the entrance to an abandoned dwarven citadel, doubtless full of treasure.

Knave is classless: your level determines your Hit Dice and how many points you have to put in your attributes, and your attributes are how good you are at traditional 'class' things. Strength is how good you are at doing Fighter things, Wisdom is Ranger things, Charisma is Clerical things, etc. You roll twice on the prior career table to figure out which broad areas you get +5 on d20 checks 2 and 6 of your starting pieces of equipment. When I was running 13th Age and new players arrived it took an hour to get them onboarded; for this getting 8 players started took 45 minutes, and about 10 minutes for each new player. I also left the pantheon wide open at start and any player who started with a Charisma score would get to roll a new deity or pick an existing one.

The human mind makes stories from randomness. The party quickly broke into two groups: the first are those who are part of the power structure:

- Claire Golden is a woman who masqueraded as a man to become a knight of Aratiri (god the hunt and smoke – the great hunt is the northern lights, and his attack is with purple lighting) and woo a princess in the court of Averoigne. She was exiled to Bog Hollow when discovered, and she now helps run one of the local inns.

- Vlad Snider was Claire's squire; upon her exile he too was removed from the lists, but was swept up by the church of Arethimas (the deity of thieves and revenge, spymaster for the gods) and trained as a spy. He has learned of the dwarven citadel near Bog Hollow and found Claire to tell her of it, in the hopes that they could find enough money to buy off her exile.
- Eimdi Qundulatun was a bookbinder in the walled city of Vyones who accepted a position with the Church of the Robed Son (god of Blossoms and Blood, his followers run orchards & scholastic monasteries) and came to regret it when posted to Bog Hollow. He uses his spare time helping the locals hunt for giant frogs (another local business besides mushrooms)[1]. He has become a friend to Claire in her exile.
- Eric Strone is a pilgrim of the Robed Son and an antiquarian, he has travelled to Bog Hollow to study the old empire manuscripts being copied there and expand his knowledge of the ancient Dwarvish outposts. He carries a holy text of St. Guinevere that has healing properties.
- Mercutio Smith, the local smith and amateur playwright, he is keenly interested in the dwarf citadel for both metals and lore. He has a copy of the play *The Robert Chambers*, which contains several spells buried in its text.
- Jaden Goldsworth is the latest of a family of alchemists in Bog Hollow, his kin have found all uses for giant frog and mushroom parts one could imagine over three generations. Thanks to extensive time spent gambling with caravan masters, he has become an acolyte of Fortuna (goddess of Luck and Silence), the only one this far removed from her Sea of Fate. He wants out, and thinks dwarven coin will get him away.

And those who are, or become, a Mushroom King cult.

- Paramiad was a drowning sailor who was saved by fungus covered driftwood, becoming a pilgrim of the Mushroom King[2]. He has been called to Bog Hollow by the music of his god.
- Aaah! is a shark person from the Sea of Fate, knight of the court of Mu, tasked with seeing Paramiad safely to the Mushroom King(likely not to humanity's benefit). She looks *mostly* human until submerged, when her full hybrid shark form appears.
- Fungoshia: The other innkeeper in Bog Hollow, he is contrary to the local government by nature and trains to be a saboteur, mastering spells of a fungal nature (his beloved *Ooze Form,* and *Nobtrik's Grim Refreshing Spores*) as well as making bombs. When Paramiad arrives, Fungoshia becomes the first local in his cult.
- Bibblebap Aronava is "a simple coachman" who took Paramiad & Aaah! on the last leg of their journey; swayed by the former's preaching, decided to stay. Actually, he's a cultist from the dragon cults and 1/32nd draconic with access to the *Ancestral Dragon Vine*, calling on the power of his ancestors. The dragon cults are illegal in Averogine, punishable by death, but he suspects powerful draconic magics lie in the lost citadel.

Does all of this sound a little bonkers? Yes, yes it does. Some players were there for just 1 or 2 sessions, but for the 8 sessions we managed to get in it worked. The party split between 'we just want to find the dwarven citadel and loot it' and the 'we want to form the cult of the Mushroom God' led to some interesting social tension, as did the randomness of play: there were a couple of weeks when none of the mushroom cultists could make it and the citadel hunters ran into the Mushroom King. Paramiad has specified that he had "have you heard the good news of the mushroom king" written on the palm of his hand in every language he had encountered, and Fungoshia knew Goblin; when the goblins showed up at the end of session 1 and he defused the encounter with that – and was thrilled that the YES the goblins had head the good news of the Mushroom King – the player was ecstatic and the game irrevocably shifted. The player thought they were just being an over the top caricature… but then went all in! When he learned that the various slimes in the cave were creations of the Mushroom King, and the olive slime turned dwarves into goblins, he jumped at it; now a Hobgoblin he is plotting the conversion of Bog Hollow. I did no plotting, instead rolling the Delve Die – in Knave you roll it every turn as a random event generator – for events in advance (if there was an encounter, I rolled it at the moment) and that led to a satisfying game with all the work well in advance. The 'dungeon' shifts worked into what had happened, or what I knew would happen from later rolls, and led to the PCs setting off a war between the goblins and the ogres, which they definitively ended for the goblins in a way that opens the dwarf citadel next summer.

[1] Yes, I'm doing the town of giant frog farmers again; also yes, I am using Clark Ashton Smith's *Averogine* as a basis for this.

[2] Swear to St. Cuthbert, the random portfolio table for the player's god was Fungi and Music; the players had no idea the mushroom king was real!

Stating up Regrets 2: 711

Second from Jon Morris' *League of Regrettable Superheroes* is 711, a two-fisted detective type with a twist: Daniel Dyce, a lawyer in jail for a crime he didn't commit, dug a tunnel that he uses to get out of, and back into, prison. During the day he is state inmate #711, gathering information from the incarcerated about their mob partners' outside plans, and at night he is the masked hero 711 thwarting those plans. I mean, three hots and a cot, your own secret base, the villains explaining their plans to you in advance… ingenious, really.[3]

Why is he in jail, you ask? Well, his friend Jacob Horn was in prison while wife was due to give birth. They hatch a scheme: Daniel would confess to Jacob's crime, freeing Jacob to see the baby born, and then Horn would confess the scheme to get Dyce back out. Alas, Horn dies in a car accident and there is no one to vouch for Dyce. Now, this is… not ingenious, but I find it strangely endearing. Dyce is making the best of it.

711 post-dates Will Eisner's *The Spirit* by about a year, but you can see Eisner's influence on the art, especially the gimmick of incorporating the hero's name into the splash page. Like the Spirit, 711 is a two-fisted detective: these are a dime a dozen and rely on their gimmicks to stand out, and his Count of Monte Cristo styling is… unique. It just doesn't lend itself to any game mechanics. What else to look at?

Villains? Mostly fighting mobsters, 711 does have one colorful villain in BrickBat, a bat-masked assassin who throws gimmicked bricks that explode, or burst with poison, or are just big heavy bricks. Oooookay. My first thought is having a lot more goofy villains ala the late '70s Plastic Man roster (such as the mobster building contractors Brickface and Stucco). We'll see.

711 is also known for his means cancellation: when fighting racketeer Orlando Jones, 711 is fatally shot. His death is witnessed by the mystic detective Destiny[4], who brought in 711's killer as his first case. It's rare to see the heroic deaths, so that's something else to play with.

Lacking anything else I'm just gonna pull out *Villains & Vigilantes* and make him with whatever comes up fromall skill table rolls. The dice gave 711 seven power rolls (appropriate) and one weakness: Heightened Charisma A x2 (+15, +4), Heightened Defense x2, Heightened Strength A (+5), Willpower x2, and Vulnerability. I can keep 5 skills, or 6 with Vulnerability.

Easy Call: five abilities give Heightened Charisma +15, Heightened Defense, Heightened Strength +5, and Willpower x2. *V&V* has at least one ability on each table which is 'make up what you want' and for skills it's Willpower. You can default to a general purpose make it up in the moment superior force of will, or you can define something else. (Shrew, one of the villains in the *Crisis at Crusader Citadel* sample adventure uses her Willpower to duplicate 3 separate heightened attributes due to her extreme boxing regime, so you can get pretty intense….) And as an oddity in *V&V*, your Charisma score isn't precisely how charming you are, it's how strong you are in your alignment: Heightened Charisma makes you more obviously Good or Evil, and others' reactions to you are modified by that. (Acting outside your alignment causes Charisma penalties, while acting strongly in it gives Charisma bonuses; it's weird.)

This, to me, shows the worth of *V&V*'s random ability generation: I now know exactly who this guy is and how to build him. Daniel Dyce is a man of indomitable force of will, intense personality and an unbreakable sense of justice. His second Willpower is an across the board +4 bonus to his non-Charisma abilities and a +4 on all attacks against one target at a time (he can't multi-attack lots of foes, but when he focuses on someone, he is fierce). He ends up with a Charisma of 25, a Strength of 18, and 15-17 in the other stats, which with *V&V*'s rules makes him a proper two-fisted hero for dealing and soaking damage.

The New Origin Story

Dyce was a charismatic defense attorney protecting the innocent in Central City. He took the case of Jacob Horn – who had snapped under the protection rackets run by the notorious Orlando Jones out of Gallows Hill Prison and murdered one of Jones' lieutenants – but was unable to keep Horn out of prison.

[3] The character 711 was created by George Brenner and is in the public domain, image comes from https://superheroes.fandom.com/wiki/711

[4] Who's gimmick was that he would be teleported places to witness crimes, and then have to catch the criminals, knowing how the crime happened.

But he could help Horn be there for his son's birth. Dyce confessed to Horn's crime, engendering a swap that the men would undo after the nativity, and Dyce trusted that his reputation and good relations with the press would have the stunt appear as altruistic and harmless. But then Horn's car slid off the road, Jacob died, and Dyce had no way out of the 25-year sentence. The press fell loved the story of the good man who had one bad night, and Daniel knew his next 25 years were lost. Unless….

In Gallows Hill, Orlando Jones confessed to Daniel that the lieutenant "Dyce" was plotting a coup against the imprisoned gangster: Dyce had done him a favor, an irony that Jones found delicious. Daniel's holier than though reputation an unflinching goodness painted a target on him, but Jones issued him a bodyguard, an aging hit man named Frank "the Abbot" Faria, who was on death row. Jones laughed himself sick at the idea of goody two shoes Dyce living through all 25 years in jail while Jones would be free in 8.

It took just 6 months for Dyce to convert the Abbot to the side of the angels. In another 18 months he had helped Dyce forge himself into an impressive physical specimen. It took another 3 for the Abbot to teach him all he knew about unarmed combat, the use of knives and clubs, picking locks, casing houses, and stealth. And over those five years Daniel had been digging his escape tunnel from his cell to the outside world. On the night of the Abbot's execution, Dyce escaped for the first time to take the identity of 711, stopping one of Jones' men from killing a witness in an upcoming murder trial.

Then amazingly, he went back to his cell. Because Jones' operations needed to be completely dismantled… a thing 711 could do only by having ears on Jone's inner circle. If he wanted to see true justice done, he most honest man in Central City needed to stay behind bars.

Yes, but how do you play it?

For a solo game, it's easy: Dyce gets forewarned of one of Jones' operations inside Gallows Hill, breaks out to foil it, and then comes back to prison. Sometimes you introduce time constraints to ramp up the tension

For a small group maybe he has regular allies who aren't as colorful – with his 24 Charisma score it's easy to see 711 convincing others to assist in his crusade; it becomes a CW superhero show in design.

If everyone else is also a costumed hero, they all need to be street level, not every plot will revolve around 711's fixation of stopping Jones, but it can work since his vibe leaves a lot of room for other hero's gimmicks. But he can't really work with truly powerful supers – 711 once shared a title with Plastic Man, but he can't join the JLA.

Wait a minute, what did you say about Charisma in V&V?

Yeah, so I did a series of Blog posts on this in 2024

https://subplotkudzu.blogspot.com/2024/02/new-salem-renaissance-mechanics.html#more

But by the book Charisma in *V&V* makes you

1) Harder to hit by mental attacks and more able to escape emotion control
2) Determines how well known they are
3) Tracks how closely they hew to the super-hero (or super-villain) ideal.
4) Modifies peoples' *initial* reactions to (which sets the modifier for any later reactions: you only get to make a first impression once in *V&V*!)
5) The most recent reaction roll is a modifier to their loyalty if you attempt to recruit them.

While drawn from D&D, it was also an actualization of the Comics Code Authority, which was in force between 1979-1982 when the first two editions of *V&V* came out. If you were in a Supers genre, you were a good guy, or trying to be, and the idea was that you needed game mechanics like alignment penalties to keep you on the straight and narrow. If you weren't heroic, you would lose Charisma points, if you did act in the heroic and self-sacrificial vein you earned them. People on your side had a better first impressions based on that score, and the people on the other side more likely to hate you. And there is only Good and Evil, no in between.

Daniel Dyce, a good man trapped in a prison full of Evil men would not last long without Orlando Jones' sense of humor, and his extreme goodness would make it *harder* for Dyce to convert the Abbot, not easier, but this is his origin story, so we can skip the game mechanics. But it would mean that people on the outside would trust the mysterious 711 quickly, and if the player wanted to engage in the mini-game of building his own group of agents (which kind of exists in *V&V* for the villains to have a handful of *Batman '66* style thugs to bolster them against the PCs, but it's the GM playing against the dice…) he could easily do so.

Comes with an end date

The final thing is I would absolutely want to keep the fact that 711 only triumphs over Orland Jones by post-humously inspiring others. It sets up Jones as being a proper Kingpin style villain, the leader of crime in the city, too big for one hero to stop. But in his death 711 is the cause for Jones' defeat, as seeing his death is the origin story for the hero (or in another game, heroes) with actual super powers who take down the Racketeer.

There's something operatic about that.

Comments on E&A 2

John Redden: re ICE invasion: well that's just horrible. What a fuckin' world. Re Cosmos Nirvana: well now I have to check this out!

Patrick Riley: re not killing Chayote: If you're not running an OSR style game then it's not an issue; the players need to know what the genre rules are for these things to work. I just had this during the last session of the summer game, where in a random encounter shortly before their objective the last giant crab spider in the dungeon managed to wound, and therefore poison, a party member, and the one piece of healing magic they had only restores HP and not wounds. The PC had 6 wound points left and was going to take 1 a round for 8 more rounds. I ruled that his *Ooze Form* spell, which lasted for turns and he cast right after the spider bit him, protected him from the poison, and it would be out of his system by the time the spell wore off. This was an OSR game, I could have easily killed him, but it was also the last game with these PCs for 8 months, and my ruling made as much sense as anything else. I do remember discussions on just this sort of thing when I first started in A&E, where the least interesting thing you can do with a character is kill them; I find the OSR movement fascinating for re-injecting higher risk and randomness over narrative and continuity. I find both types of games fun, in their own spaces.

Mules Corcoran: re Mausritter: at leas one rat has eyes bigger than their hit points! Ha! Re calculating XP: I'm in much the same space - I want to try new things but the underlying engine had better be damn simple. I'm very excited in concept by Draw Steel but I worry about the high number of crunchy bits (though I do feel better after watching some of their actual play).

Attronarch: Once again these show the tension that comes from an OSR exploration. I did LOL at the suicide corridor response.

Mark Nemeth: re GM style: Yeah, this is a real thing; the rules are one thing, the table rules are another, and the GM's presentation is something else again. As for battling through or circumventing, that's really at the heart of a style issue. Weirdly these days I find that the fewer rules there are (*Knave*) the more the players try to completely circumvent the challenges (granted the *Knave* rulebook tells them to do that) as opposed to using the tools laid out on their character sheet to try to do the cool things those tools are meant for in the spaces where they are meant to be used.

I'm remembering back in *A&E* when I was arguing about people trying to use the negotiation rules in games to short-circuit scenes that other players signed up for, and the need for some sort of legitimate consequence for failing in a charisma-based task resolution equivalent to failing at a stealth or combat based task resolution. And for some systems/settings I stand by that.

Re humanoids don't chat: For what it's worth, I'm a fan of having some opposition intractable to negotiation.

Re *Daggerheart*: You are not alone in wanting the art to feel varied. I don't mind it when the game has a single artist on the book (such as Jeff Dee on *V&V*, or Peter Mullen on *Knave*) but if they have a bunch of artists then they should have identifiable styles. As for initiative, I don't know that is contrary though; the spirit of the game (from what I've seen) is session asymmetrical spotlight time that balances out over the campaign: this is episode is the paladin's story, so it makes sense for them to dominate today's action economy, and for me as GM to focus on their villain. In part that's how Critical Role works were the narrative story is so central that everyone backs off to let Judy shine this week; but those people are also paid actors and not players so yeah, it takes a lot of work for existing gamers to adopt that dynamic. But for people who haven't played but know TTRPG through critical role, maybe this makes sense?

Dylan Capel: Ok, the idea of each PC having a unique piece of dungeoneering equipment is really cool. Stolen!

Patrick Zoch: I love Dyson's stuff. His Megadelve has been the framework of my summer campaign and it's just top notch. And this map of yours is also quite nice and being stolen for future use. Re Villain Treasure: There are some game engines out there that assume the villains WILL NOT use the magic items generated for their treasure that's just bonkers to me. Sometimes sure, the clerics won't be using the holy relics, the hobgoblins don't know what the potion does any more than you do. But come on, all the time?

Jim Eckman: re SF games: The most fun I've had with an SF game was with Decipher's *Star Trek* game (the PCs were the crew of the USS Carter, a science vessel focusing on archaeology) but it's wildly out of print. It really did feel like Star Trek though. Many years ago one of my regular players got behind the GM screen for a "space patrol" game where the plot centered on first contact with violent aliens, using a BRP/CoC system. It worked pretty well. We just kept expecting the monster to be mythos-related, and it wasn't. Basically when I'm doing outer space SF I'm playing in someone else's sandox - either Star Trek or Traveller (which even if I don't use the 3rd Imperium the game has so many ingratiated world bits that it is always recognizable) - so

these decisions are handled. I'm not sure why I never do from scratch worlds here when I do everywhere else.

Heath Row: "If Fanac becomes a hassle, we're doing it wrong." I keep trying to remind myself of that

Mark A. Wilson: The idea of using the biofeedback techniques your monk would be using on yourself during play is truly clever!

Clark Timmins: Not trying to start a fight, but it's "Jaquaysing", not "Xandering". Re "seems to make sense" surface followed by the "doesn't really make sense" reality: That got a chuckle.

Joshua Kronengold: Great to see you here! Even if I don't have any specific comments.

I lied, I do have comments. I haven't been seeing "best In Life" as being a 'drive' per se, but as a strong character beat. Of course, my campaign is a split between the PCs chasing down their mortal enemy with his vast power and opaque schemes and needing to defend/expand their thieves' guild's territory after losing 90% of the original members.

Lisa Padol: re divination and empathy: You do realize not all players are you, right? ;-) The solution I've come up with in *13th Age* is that the PC with the "trained in divination" background can use this to divine things that he might otherwise get through any other background use - consulting the cards is the equivalent of buying drinks at the tavern; using a puddle of wine to make a scrying mirror in the tavern is as good as sneaking close to hear noise; it's all chrome. As for more powerful uses... here's something from my article in the *Escalation* fanzine on clerics....

> **Spiritual Advisors/Diviners**
>
> Finally, Clerics serve as spiritual advisors for their community. The Crown Abbeys strive for truth and restoration of comity inside the community. The Hearth Order guides to reconciliation between the aggrieved as a path to peace and love. The Pillars of Faith will not allow injustices to fester and demand penance. The Glittering Choir quietly guides people to harmony. All of this requires the revelation of truth, confession of guilt, real repentance, and acceptance of same.
>
> You can't develop story hooks on this Clerical function because the act of being a spiritual adviser or diviner *is* the story hook. They provide role playing opportunities or information dumps as NPCs come to them for advice, but they are still story hooks. Even when it's a PC going to an NPC cleric for advice, that Cleric is providing a story hook. This means they aren't Rituals as they're no cost.
>
> When a PC Cleric prepares a divinatory ritual, ask why the players are doing this.
>
> - They are lost/confused: make it an interesting moment for the PC as you clarify the story hook… at no cost. If the disquiet spirit wants to know who killed it but the players are trying to figure how they can fight it, the 'ritual' clarifies they're in a murder mystery, not *Ghostbusters*.
> - They want a shortcut to get to the 'exiting' part: they're deciding it's worth a resource to save time. Gives them about half the clues immediately and recalibrate the adventure so they can possibly catch the enemy unawares.
> - They think they've figured out what's going on but want a tactical advantage: If they can identify what's really going on, give them an infodump of the ultimate enemy's plans, motivations and weaknesses before the final fight. If they're guessing wrong, reveal the real solution (a "Wait, he's the killer?!?" moment) and jump to the endgame while giving the PCs a slight advantage. - they spent game time investigating and expended a resource, give them something even if they were wrong.

Brian Misiaszek: I'm filing the Havana Horror scenario away for later use; likely converted to Trail since I have players used to Gumshoe now.

Everyone else RAEBNC

Vacation Read Reviews to Fill Space:

You Can't Spell Treason Without Tea by Rebecca Thorne: Cozy Fantasy is the new thing, and this was… cute. We now have an entire genre dedicated to the people who play D&D but want to run shops rather than adventure.

Three Hours in Paris by Cara Black: An assassin fails to kill Hitler, and must escape occupied Paris. This wasn't quite what I expected but I enjoyed it

The Hundred Thousand Kingdoms by NK Jemisin: I'm sure I'm the last in the class to read this, but it was very good

Dungeon Crawler Carl Books 1 & 2 by Matt Dinniman: I read these in one day each and am desperately waiting for my library to get me books 3&4. Gamer 'beach reads' with more emotion than you'd expect.

Goodnight Captain Fasaad, wherever you are.

88

THE DRAGON'S BEARD

SEPTEMBER 2025

© PATRICK ZOCH

CURRENTLY PLAYING...

I have two groups who play virtually live, and both groups had technical troubles last month that took a bite out of our playing time. In one group, the DM lost internet in his neighborhood as the local utility company performed maintenance on the lines for a couple of weeks. In the other group, one of the player's computer completely died and we had to wait for the new one to arrive before we could resume playing. When it did, the DM's computer started to fail as soon as we started the session. Luckily, it was just a temporary issues and it was back to working order the next week.

We are almost complete with the D&D 5E conversion of the Pathfinder adventure series The Abomination Vaults played on Fantasy Grounds Unity. This group uses Discord for voice and Syrinscape for ambient music. I really like the FGU system, though I had not been on it for a couple of years and there were numerous changes that required some refamiliarization with the interface to get myself up to speed. The DM used the animated maps that came with the adventure for FGU. The adventure was massive, and we pushed hard to get through the game quickly in our four-hour sessions each week. The large animated maps caused some latency issues with some players, so the DM turned them off most of the time. Running Discord VOIP, FGU with animated maps, AND Syrinscape can tax budget computer systems. In this game, I play a Wood Elf Cleric of the Trickster Domain. My primary role is a healer, but I have a few utility spells that have become useful from time to time. I focused on a dexterity build, but it turned out that the entire party was dexterity focused, including all the fighters. My female wood elf is tied for the second strongest character in the group, and despite having dexterity as a secondary stat she is one of the slowest in the group. I have enjoyed playing her very much. The Abomination Vaults adventure has been interesting and has provided us some challenging scenarios to solve socially and mentally in addition to physically. The DM has occasionally voiced some displeasure over the 5E conversion where the replacement monster, challenge, or item for the original Pathfinder element did not translate very well, creating either a mismatch in the encounter balance or an incoherent element in the scenario. We should finish the campaign before the next issue of E&A. Next month, one of the players in the group is looking to take over GMing duties, though I do not know for which game. I was a replacement player for the group who came in late to help finish the Adventure Series. Hopefully, I will be able to continue playing with the same group.

My other live game is also D&D 5E (2024 rules) Curse of Strahd. The group uses D&D Beyond as its VTT platform, supported by Discord VOIP. It is also presented live on YouTube. One player is using his smartphone to play the game. This game only runs in two-hour sessions each week, so it is naturally progressing slower. I was not overawed by D&D Beyond as a VTT platform, but I have gotten used to it and find it perfectly functional and more intuitive as a player. I still prefer FGU. I am playing a cleric in this game also — an orc Cleric of Life. As an orc, he has been extremely durable and provides a reliable source of healing for the rest of the party. While he is physically capable and armed well enough to engage in melee combat, my rolls have proven that my character has chosen the life of a healer for a reason — he can't hit the broad side of a barn if he was next to it. Now, if the barn needed healing, then he would excel! While he shines as a cleric, he hasn't really shined as an orc ... yet.

I am in six games running over play by forum (PbF) format on RPGGeek.com.

1: I started out as a Yuanti-Pureblood rogue in a D&D 5E hack call Grim-n-Gritty, which have low hit points and HP progression and high lethality. The campaign began in Hommlet in the World of Greyhawk, but we never made it to the Temple of Elemental Evil. There was lots of intrigue we were uncovering, but it ended up with us being teleported in a tower to the world of Hârn where we became embroiled in more intrigue in the new land and discovered that one of our party members is a returning king to his people. We've been playing this campaign by PbF for over four years.

2: I am playing a wizard in a Dungeon Crawl Classic game. All but one of my characters died in the initial funnel adventure. I have envisioned by character being a knight, but became a wizard instead (who caries a sword and shield still and runs out of magic all to quickly). We've been playing this game for over two years. Our first real adventure with characters with class experience has nearly ended in a TPK. One player is hanging one with 1 HP and another was transformed into a birdman as part of a desperate attempt to heal him. It has been a fun game, but a little slow after the near TPK.

3: I am playing a wookie heavy weapons and demo expert in a West End Games Original edition Star Wars RPG. This saves me a lot of dialogue. The rest of the party is lethal enough to not need any muscle, the wookie can certainly cause some chaos when the me-

lee breaks out. This group has played for over two years also and remains a very active and creative group.

4: Earlier this year I joined my favorite heroes rpg: Sentinel Comics: The RPG. It is always a blast creating a hero as I never know what type of hero I am going to be going into it. I ended up creating Guardian, an angelic protector. The rest of the superhero team is an odd collection of beings. We are still going through our first fight — the game paused a couple of time for personal health reasons. I will always join a game of Sentinel Comics.

5. I waffled over backing Monty Python's Cocurricular Mediaeval Reenactment Programme when it was on Kickstarter. It was a game that I was certain I could not run well. I leaped at the chance to join a game starting up earlier this year. I am playing a Churl whose misfortunes in helping Sir Cadwallon the Chaste (another player) find the Holy Grail (as quested by God) has left him both virtually dead and crackers. We had a bunch of spectators who kept chiming in with Monty Pythonesque jokes at first, but the GM (and players) found it a bit too disruptive and had to mute them all except one who was made the official heckler for the game. It has been genuine Monty Pythonesque silliness throughout the game. And it is definitely one I could not run myself. I am thankful for the opportunity to be a player.

6. Last game I recently joined is a mixture of different rules to run a game set in Sengoku Era Japan. It is run by the same GM who runs the Grim-n-Gritty game. The game uses a mixture of Star Wars (WEG 2nd Edition), Sengoku, Cortex Prime, Bushido, BESM (2nd Edition), Barbarians of Lemuria, Legend of the Five Rings (4th Edition), and more. It makes it a little tricky to know what we can do and how, but all the players have been fully committed to role playing and posting wonderful entries to drive the game. In this game, I play a Samurai Courier of the Dragon Clan. I had intended to be a minor character and follow everyone else's lead, but the GM establish the scenario with my character as the central one that everyone else is supporting/accompanying. We just started the game, and though we encountered some bandits, the combat has been brief. The social interaction between characters as they seek to establish their standing and honor within the group has been interesting and well composed. It is set in historical Feudal Japan, but there is some magic components to the game world. As such, we are all doing our level best to portray our characters as historically accurate as possible. I look forward to seeing how this game will play out.

Unfortunately, I do not have any face-to-face role playing games at the moment. But I am finding and joining games where I can, and my gaming plate feels full.

Leavenworth Wargames

Leavenworth, Kansas, has a small wargames club that has been around for many years, which stands to reason since Fort Leavenworth teaches and practices wargaming and virtual battle simulations for its Soldiers and Leaders as part of its training curriculum for almost 100 years. Many members of the wargaming club are present and former members of the faculty of the Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth. Every year, the club hosts an Epic Game Day at the local community center open where club members run multiple wargame tables, providing all the materials, rules, and refereeing for the attendees. This year marked the 50th Anniversary of the publication of the Dunn-Kempf: Battle Guide to Simulation rules for modern warfare (well, 1977-1997). The Dunn-Kempf rules were published by the US Army and it issues the rules along terrain board and micro-armor to units as a training tool. Mike Dunn, one half of the Dunn-Kempf design team, was on hand with an original Dunn-Kempf wargame set to run a game. I do know I used Dunn-Kempf sets to practice wargaming with my units when I was a junior officer, and friends of mine recall having to sign for the sets as part of their inventories. When I arrived at the Epic Game Day event and saw the Dunn-Kempf set on the table, it had a strong nostalgic to my younger days as a lieutenant in the Army.

The club ran five other games in morning and another five in the afternoon, ranging from Punic Wars between Carthage and Rome, to the War of the Spanish Succession, to the American Revolution, War of 1812, American Civil War (including a battle of Ironclads), and WW2.

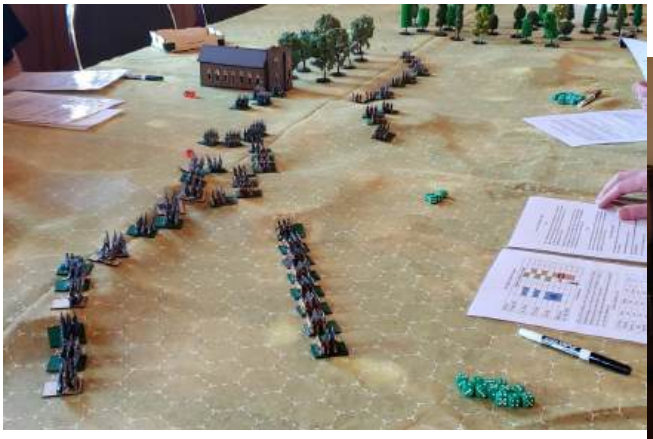
Full house at the Epic Game Day

Dunn-Kempf game set

War of 1812

American Civil War

War of the Spanish Succession



Punic War

My son and I joined the WW2 game set in Northern France run by Don Matchek. He developed his own streamlined ruleset call *Decision Point*. He was still adjusting the equipment tables but felt the game was nearing publication. He intends the game to reward smart tactical decisions while punishing bad tactical decisions. My son played the German armored forced who were advancing into a town occupied by my American infantry forces hoping the delay the German advance. To combat the German armored vehicles, my infantry were armed with bazookas, which were effective only at close range in the flanks, a platoon of M10 Tank Destroyers (Wolverines), and a couple of M1 AT guns. I had two other players who controlled the infantry companies, all of which hid in the buildings of the towns, while I controlled the heavy equipment. Another player joined my son on the German side, but he only wanted to play the Heavy Tiger platoon. The Germans had a decided superiority in equipment and numbers.

We even the odds a little with a couple of well placed mine fields that disrupted the advancing Panthers and Tiger platoons. My T10 Wolverines ambushed the Tigers as they navigated around a mined road into town; we destroyed half the Tigers in quick order.

Then came the rest of the forces. While the German armor was having a rough go along the flanks, the company of mechanized infantry assaulted under cover of smoke down the center while the Americans were focused on the German armor.

Unfortunately, session time ran out before the battle would culminate, but we enjoyed time we had to play the game. The GM warned us ahead of time that ranges would be deceiving, which we felt were extremely limiting and did not reflect range to scale at all. We did not dedicate too much time studying the weapon tables and numbers, and just tried to employ them according to their intended use (not so much if they would be effective against certain targets). We relied more on the GM to tell us what to role and what the results were. In a way, it felt much like a role playing game where the players told the GM what our character/unit was doing and asked what to roll, and waited for the GM to tell us if it were successful. One thing I really liked about Don's Decision Point system was the random draw of hit effects and the hidden nature of those effects. The players knew what the effect was on his damaged unit, but the opposing player did not.

I look forward to attending again next year.

Marvel United

I am woefully behind in all my painting projects. I have armies of Bolt Action stacked up behind a growing collection of Marvel United miniatures. Numerous D&D minis have been relegated to the back of the line until I get a face to face group started again.

I finally got back to painting some more Marvel United this summer. Iron Man was my first attempt at non-metal metal painting. I found it difficult to be satisfied with, but I am pleased with the results in the end. I think the extra dark line in the bright spot and the extra bright line in the darker area helped make the non-metal metal attempt tolerable. I need more practice.

For Ultron, I chickened-out of attempting another non-metal metal effect and went straight to using metallic paints. I tried to create more shading with various shades of silver, but it was nearly impossible for me to figure out how to do well. In the end, I decided to call it good enough.

Ant-man got the metallic paint use also. It worked fined, but like my effort with Ultron, I could not get proper shading/lighting effects with metallic paint. I was pleased with the fine lining, and I am really pleased with the eye lenses.

I still have two more minis to paint in the base box. I got the first five minis done last year, so I hope to finish the box before the year is out. At this rate, I won't finish all my Marvel United minis for another 30 years!

Dream Fish

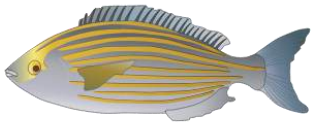


Image from Integration and Application Network (ian.umces.edu/media-library). Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-SA 4.0)

The *Sarpa Salpa,* or Cow Bream, is also known as a Dream Fish for its hallucinogenic effect when ingested. Apparently, the effect is similar to those of psychedelic drugs like LSD. While the *Sarpa Salpa* has little application as a creature in an RPG, it has interesting potential as an hazard in the environment, much like any other poisonous item ingested unknowingly. However, instead of causing some sort of saving throw against death or damage, the save is against suffering hallucinations for a period of time. Unlike saves against spells that subject the target to hallucination effects, the save against ingesting a Sarpa Salpa is a CON save instead of a WIS save. In the D&D 5E DM's guide, madness as suffered through hallucinations effects cause disadvantage on all ability rolls. D&D 2-4th editions did not seem to address hallucination effects (other than spells). The DM's Guide for AD&D 1E has Hallucinatory Insanity that is triggered under stressful conditions; otherwise the effected person behaves normally 50% of the time while suffering the condition. Mechanical effects are not provided.

As inspiration for an encounter, the party could come across a group of fishermen (on shore or ship) who seem to have eaten the Sarpa Salpa unaware of its toxins and are suffering hallucinations. The hallucinating fishermen are either fighting imaginary beings, innocent bystanders, each other, or the approaching adventurers all perceived by the fisherman as dangerous creatures to be defeated. Hints of the condition could come from the shouts of the fisherman, calling the victims of their unwarranted attacks harpies, fish-men, frog-men, lizardmen, sea dragons, hags, and more.

A clue to the source of hallucinations would be the absence of magic on the victims and perhaps the unfinished portions of the foot-long fish around the campsite. Detecting the toxins of a Sarpa Salpa would require an extremely difficult nature check, reduced only if the checker was also a proficient sailor or had a sailor background. A proficient chef might also be suspicious of preparing the fish properly, but still not know the true hazard of eating the toxic fish.

2 Comments

Patrick Riley — Re: Positive and Negative scales on the Big 5 Traits for NPCs. Great observation for which I owe you a clarification. I erred in my use of the terms positive and negative in my NPC examples. The tables are actually labeled as High and Low as a scale, and I should have been consistent when I used a half random option and just stated as high or low instead of positive and negative. All the charts have extremes and moderations, and high and low attributes can still be positive traits depending on how they are presented, and negative if too extreme. Except for the neuroticism which seems to scale from stable to various degrees and qualities of neurotic behaviors. I was always a little annoyed at this attribute because it suggests that everyone is at least a little bit neurotic, but there had to be some extreme were such emotional stability was so stable it became unfeeling, I guess. I'm no behavioral scientist, I just wanted to create a unique trait table to randomly generate rich trait features for NPCs. In the end, if I did not like a result, or I could not rationally tie all the traits together coherently, I simply selected a different trait off the table and ran with the new result.

Myles Corcoran — RYCTM Re: Zoch's Big 5 Traits for NPCs. I share you disdain for the Meyers-Briggs personality types, and other personality tests like it. These were in vogue for way too long in many leadership courses with the notion that understanding your own personality type and those of your employees, a leader could adjust their management technique to get the most out of their employees by knowing their personality trait. I disliked it for several reasons. Most people wrongly guessed their own type. If they can not guess their own type, how can they possibly guess someone else's type? Organizations do not have time to conduct personality type assessments on every employee. Managers do not have time to customize their directives and guidance to every type of employee. Different types of employees can still contribute to the organizations missions and goals, and can all be just as loyal and dedicated to company and even share the same values, despite their different personalities. And even if two people had identical personality types, they would still be two different people who are more than their type label. So many other things need to be considered other than personality types. However, I do find the organization of traits, and even the taxonomies applied to them interesting. I thought about sub-traits, but I figured that would make the table more complicated than it needed to be. I figured that the user could directed selected an appropriate sub trait, or even develop their own table as a supplement. For example, I once considered a phobia sub table in support of the neuroticism chart. However, that would be a misapplication of a phobia (an irrational fear — which is a disorder) to a personality trait (which are not disorders despite the extremeness of a trait). But I also did not want to get into behavioral vs psychology vs medical vs sociological conflicts by delving too deep into other tables. I figure the Big 5 would be a good start for everyone. If supplemental or companions charts to appear by other contributors sometime in the near future, I am pleased that my Big 5 inspired such expansions.

Mark Nemeth — Re: Retirement and departed employees. Due to some mix-ups, a few employees who departed suddenly when given the opportunity during the government downsizing had to return to the office to complete some additional paperwork. Most were tan and well rested. Some had taken up other employment or volunteer work they always wanted to do if they had the time. None were unhappy in any way. And none were bitter, much less held a grudge over not getting a better farewell. So, I am happy for them (and a little envious — not that I am counting down the days to my next retirement, but I do know when it will be).

Michael Cule — RYCTM Re: Big 5 could be smaller. I agree. When I first started collecting the data, some tables had over 25 traits and some had less than 15. That unevenness annoyed my sense of order. And I did not like that some original tables did not match any polyhedron dice in existence. I forced the 2d20/d100 structure just to create some symmetry. For some tables, traits were left on the cutting room floor. For other, I added additional traits that were nuance differences to flesh out the table. For stronger differentiation between the traits, any GM could cut half of the table out (I would start with any that required looking up in a dictionary first!) to simplify it. I'm happy to give that GM a good first list to start work. And I agree that not every NPC needs a full personality work-up. Random NPCs on the street are not typically going to provide enough engagement for a PC learn their personality. I also had players who strangely wanted to be friend with every NPC they saw. This ain't Mayberry, folks.

Paul Holman — Re: Supplemental table for what the NPC is currently doing or preoccupied with. Good idea, though I think it would be too scenario specific or produce results that might be inconsistent with the situation. I'll ponder it for the next random table.

Heath Row — I hope to continue making such contributions in E&A.

Joshua Kronengold — Yay! Another A&E veteran returns! RE: Good Society. I appreciate your thoughts on running NPCs in Good Society. I've shared them with my daughter who occasionally runs Good Society games for her group.

Lisa Padol – So happy to see you in E&A! RYCT Patrick Riley, Re: me and an igtheme about handling NPC. Having set procedures based on how NPCs act is very much how the military defines rules of engagement (or ROE). Establishing those rules ahead of time save a lot of time during the game and in the situation. Too much uncertainty may result in a lost moment (or life) because everyone wasted time thinking about what to do while everything else in the world continued to move. Re: Good Society and Connections. Also appreciate that perspective which I have also shared with my daughter who runs that game for her group.

Brian Christopher Misiaszek — Whoah! What a massive issue of goodness. Love how you brought the entire Havana Horror campaign world together. Your previous issue's work on the pulp writing on fascism shows its fruit in this setting. I like the Pulp Cthulhu version of CoC. One day, I may actually run a game — If I can only find the players.

Jim Vassilakos – Thanks for participating in the NPC exercise! Seryn looks like an interesting NPC. It does take some creative work to put together, so it is an exercise I reserve for important or regular NPCs.

Dylan Capel, John Redden, Brian Rogers — Glad to see returning A&E veterans in E&A.

Everyone else – Ran out of time and space. RAEBNC.

I can be found as pdzoch at boardgamegeek.com, rpggeek.com, enworld.org, fantasy-grounds.com, discord.com, and

END

Engines & Emulators #3

Aug. 21, 2025

Engines & Emulators is an apazine published by Blasted Heath Row, P.O. Box 259240, Madison, WI 53725; kalel@well.com; +1 718 755-9840 mobile; +1 323 916-0367 fax. It is prepared for contributors to Ever & Anon and select others. A recent copy can be requested for the Usual. A member of the Fan Writers Association (fwa). This is a Karma Lapel publication.

An Apparent Preference for *Pathfinder*

Since I moved to Wisconsin, *Pathfinder* keeps coming up. In late July, after my first official day in the local office of my employer—I've now got an assigned desk and key cards for the building and parking lot—I learned that there was a workplace "MSN TTRPG" group that had organized late last year to play *Pathfinder*. I reached out on the chat space to introduce myself and see if there was a current game I could get in on. (I'd previously run *Pathfinder* sessions at one of my previous worksites in southern California because I wanted to experience 3.5, so it'd be a neat return.) While the group, mostly newcomers to roleplaying games, had gone through the *Pathfinder Beginner Box* introductory adventure at the end of 2024, they "kind of petered out this spring" and haven't gathered since. We'll see if anything gels in the office where I now work.

Early this month, a long-time friend—we worked at the same Boy Scout camp the summer after I graduated from high school—messaged me on the Facebook while in the area before returning home: "I'm at Noble Knight running away from a *Pathfinder* table that I'm way under-experienced to play. Welcome back to the Middle West! I'm headed to Willy Street to find some cheese. If you're free, let's trade a story or two? If not, hope to cross your path." We weren't able to connect before he drove back to Indianford from Madison, but we'll see each other soon, I'm sure.

I recently remarked on being drawn to the *Pathfinder* Pocket Edition volumes while browsing at a nearby store, I'm Board! Games & Family Fun. (*E&E* #2) Excited about the possibility of a workplace session, I checked in at Gamer's Library (also *E&E* #2) to see if they had it in stock or could order a copy before I ordered one from Paizo directly. Once it arrived in the mail, I randomly selected a character's ancestry, background, and class, creating a dwarf barbarian named Kotri. The dice might have been inspired by my recent listening to an audiobook of William King's Gotrek & Felix novel *Trollslayer*. I haven't yet finished the character, but if a game does spin up at work, at least I'll be prepared.

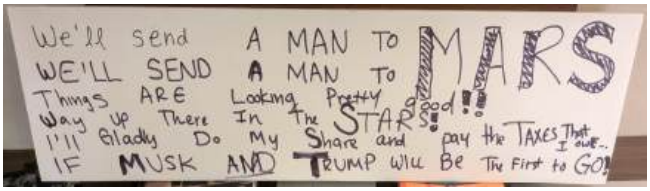
And last weekend, at Egocon, a one-day *Doctor Who* event north of Madison (*Telegraphs & Tar Pits* #175), Jason Belter, who coordinates Paizo Organized Play in Wisconsin, ran several *Starfinder* games. I didn't join in on any of the sessions, but he ran several adventures, attracting three or four players.

Other than seeing a flier for the Old School Renaissance-focused Venger Con IV in early June, a flier for a largely inactive Fox River OSR group at UFO Museum Gift Shop and Records (https://www.facebook.com/GBUFOrecords) in Green Bay in late July, and fliers for Gamehole Con 12 (https://www.gameholecon.com) posted beside the urinals at MadEx (T&T #174), most of the roleplaying game opportunities I've encountered since moving here seem to point toward *Pathfinder*.

I find that interesting!

Billions Vs. Billionaires—at Worldcon

While I didn't go to the recent Worldcon in Seattle, a friend of mine, Nick Mamatas, did. On the Friday night of the con, he hosted a room party to recognize the publication of a fanzine titled *It's Okay, Just Set Me on Fire!* and a two-page roleplaying game by M.K. Anderson, *Musk Pit: Mars*. Both are available from https://billionsvsbillionaires.itch.io. The party's refreshments featured a beverage called Muskblood, which consists of rhubarb and strawberry gin, vodka, Diet Coke Caffeine Free ("Musk's fave!"), grenadine syrup, and lemon.



Courtesy of Nick Mamatas

The party was reportedly "hoppin'," and even though the hotel "demanded quiet," no noise complaints were received. However, copies of the Mamatas-edited anthology *120 Murders* and his forthcoming novel *Kalivas! Or, Another Tempest* were available for purchase. Safely at the Infernal Wilson, I downloaded the fanzine and roleplaying game.

The 22-page fanzine features writing by Cyan Katz, Rick Claypool, Anderson, Britta Burdett, Bitter Karella, and Elly Bangs. Anderson's contribution, "Elon's Basilisk," features gameplay elements, including a 2d6 table, "The Elon Matrix," which might prove useful in other dystopic cyberpunk game settings. The rest of the material is cleverly critical AI- and Mars-related sf.

Musk Pit: Mars, then, is a two-page roleplaying game for one GM and up to three players—though you can easily play it solo. (In fact, I highly recommend it.) To create a character, you answer three questions, rolling dice and referring to tables: Who did you think you were? What must you do? What are you hiding from us? (That last question reminded me of *Paranoia*.)

There are two abilities: Dumb and Luck. (Together, Dumb Luck.) Characters strive to accomplish one of three objectives, and failed tasks attract the attention of Elon Musk, triggering Elon Events. If characters draw Musk's serious attention, they get sent to the Musk Pit of the game's title.

I don't know how much game-related programming there was at Worldcon, but I was pleased that at least one room party was centered on fanzines and roleplaying games, as well as political activism. Both the fanzine and the game are worth spending time with.

From the Reading Pile: Comic Book Reviews

Pathfinder: Wake the Dead #1-4 (Dynamite, 2023)

Inspired by my repeated exposure to *Pathfinder* in recent months (see above), I read several issues of this 2023 comic book series. I occasionally enjoy roleplaying game tie-in comics (*Culver City Comics Collector* #4—I published six issues!—*Theoretically: Game* #1, and a Media Diet Comics Commentary video I recorded during the pandemic—https://youtu.be/I41yIceVOCw), and this was no exception.

Written by Fred Van Lente and drawn by Eman Casallos, the series features iconic *Pathfinder* characters such as Sajan, Lem, Seelah, and Harsk (you might recognize them from the artwork in the handbooks)—and introduces a consulting investigator named Quinn. While the comic draws heavily on the *Pathfinder* world of Golarion, game mechanics don't really show up in the story beyond the inclusion of creatures from the various *Bestiary* volumes, such as shredskins.

Instead, the story, which focuses primarily on undead themes given the series' title and the character Nyctessa of Geb, is a relatively straightforward fantasy adventure. There's even a zombie triceratops.

Game elements come more into play in the Pathfinder Rules Appendix material included at the end of each issue. Articles written by Mikhail Rekhun focus on the iconic characters featured in the series, even including a character sheet for each. #1 features Seelah the champion, #2 Sajan the monk, #3 Lem the bard, and #4 Quinn.

There were five issues in total, so I haven't yet read the whole storyline. Regardless, the series is fun, funny—and offers game-related content you can incorporate into your own game, if interested. The Pathfinder Rules Appendix material is even approved for use in Pathfinder Society public play. Dynamite also collected the series in a 136-page hardcover so you don't need to miss an issue—like I did.

Comments on Ever & Anon #2

In *Reddened Stars* #0, **John Redden** reported on recent reading, local theater, and television viewing. I was alarmed to learn of the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement raid of South Kona Farms. Locking the gate sounds like a good idea. I enjoyed the writeups of the Reconstructing Planets and *Horror on the Orient Express*—perhaps appropriate given your recent theater experience!—game sessions. I quite like the idea of adapting short stories for game sessions and can appreciate the concerns about railroading. I shall have to look into your new novel, *Cosmos Nirvana*. Your recent travels to Norway sound like quite an adventure. Where did you live in Culver City? I was unaware we had that in common.

Brian Rogers's *Denizens of the Library* #1 marked his return to an Alarums & Excursions-related apa after a six-year absence. Welcome back! I recognize your name, so we might have overlapped in the past. Congratulations on running the recent 5K. I used to run—and run 5Ks—but have fallen out of the habit. I am glad that you run games for teenagers at the local library. That's a worthy endeavor.

I was very intrigued by "Stating up Regrets 1: The Eye." Not only is it a great idea to create characters based on Golden Age comic books and potentially public domain superheroes, but the gameplay opportunities, solo and otherwise, are vastly apparent. I've been interested in returning to *Champions* or *Villains and Vigilantes* in recent months—a supers game in which there's not an ossified extensive universe of heroes and villains already. There's got to be a rules light supers option someone could use to adapt comics, regardless of whether it's a single issue, miniseries, or series.

A *Cannibal Halfling Gaming* post (https://cannibalhalflinggaming.com/2024/05/07/rules-lite-superhero-

rpgs-revisited-part-1) recommends *Risus* as one possible option. And a Reddit post in r/Solo_ Roleplaying suggests games including *Friendly Neighborhood Superhero*, *Anyone Can Wear the Mask*, *Supersworn*, and *Herosworn*. I'm not recommending that you ditch *Gumshoe*, but you've given me food for thought, as well! (I'm going to check out *Superhero: 2044* for solo play.) Thank you for sharing "Reviews to Fill Space." Your reading notes offered much more than space-filler.

In *Quasipseudoludognostication* #2, **Patrick Riley** took a cue from George Phillies and expanded on his gaming journey. You reminded me of my own introduction to the AD&D *Monster Manual*. While I later bought my own new copy of *Monster Manual II*, my *Monster Manual* was a hand-me-down copy of the first cover edition—and I forget from whom. I'll have to dig it out once our belongings (and we) arrive in Portugal, but I remember that whoever owned it before me had colored in the front flyleaf with a bright pink crayon, perhaps with somewhat cryptic hand-lettered text such as song lyrics. (They might have done so to replicate the red flyleaf included in earlier printings of the book.) A few of the monster illustrations inside were also colored in, either with crayon or magic marker. I remember feeling amused as I imagined someone "getting high" and reading through the *Monster Manual*.

In your writeup, "The Adventurers Guild," I especially enjoyed that "[o]ne of the stated goals of this gaming group is to socialize in person (and not on screens)... ." I also appreciated the photographs of miniatures. Are those minis actually being used in the game? They're beautiful. I like the way you lay out your apazine with boxed content like that in published modules. We could recreate the quests on our own!

Gabriel Roark's *Bugbears & Ballyhoo* #41 updated apans on his mother's health and father's retirement. I'm glad that "[s]he is getting her fiery personality back"—and that you've returned to ice skating in adulthood! Growing up in southern Wisconsin, I skated every winter on Haumerson Pond near my childhood home. I'd cut across neighbors' yards walking through the snow, and the warming shed of my youth was a ramshackle affair. I understand it's much nicer now; I've never seen or used it. The pond was divided by a slender peninsula, and we only ever skated on the near side. Beyond the peninsula and far side was the Bark River.

When my wife and I moved to southern California, buying a home in Culver City, we lived within easy walking distance of the Culver Ice Arena, which closed after 52 years in 2014. We skated there only a few times with our son before it was shuttered. I remember not wanting it to be turned into a climbing gym, but it ended up a Harbor Freight. I would have preferred a climbing gym! The Harbor Freight is only using about half the space, but I appreciate that they kept most of the exterior and signage the way it was.

I am indeed a member of the National Fantasy Fan Federation (https://tnfff.org), which is how I first met George Phillies. In fact, I used to edit its clubzine, *The National Fantasy Fan*, and serve on the directorate, even as its chairman for a time. These days I participate in its apa, N'APA, and remain a general member.

Eep! I forgot to loop back to you once we were safely settled in Madison. I've now emailed you where you can mail the A&E back issues I'd sent you. To wit, the P.O. Box at the top of this apazine. We'll be here at least until the end of September, and the P.O. Box will remain active even after that. (My parents will check it weekly for anything pressing, and the bulk of our mail will await our periodic return.)

You are right: We should probably confer with Lee Gold about collecting an archive of A&E PDFs. My hypothesis is that she didn't want purchasers to share the PDFs they bought with others so such sharing didn't lessen the potential supply of future purchasers. That might have changed now that she's no longer selling back issues.

In *Twisting the Rope* #2, **Myles Corcoran** used the phrase "the delight of ice cream vendors," which I found poetic imagery. We're immigrating to Portugal in part to get our cost of living low enough that my wife and I can stop working a decade-plus earlier than we might otherwise. With our son graduating from college next year, we didn't need to stay in southern California, where we'd moved to better share custody and which we enjoyed thoroughly. In the interim, we live closer to our extended families.

Since we've been traveling to Portugal over the last few years, we've fallen in love with its landscape, cities, history, culture, and people. We're both still in our 50s and hope that travel, learning new languages, and other activities will help us age more gracefully. Tickling the old neuroplasticity, if you will.

We've also been inspired by Portugal's modern constitution. The collective memory of its relatively recent fascist dictatorship remains strong. The country's leadership seems to have the best interests of its citizens in mind. We'd like to experience living in Europe and traveling throughout the European Union more—and plan to maintain firm footing in the United States all the while, likely in the Midwest.

Apologies for the truncated ish; I'd like to make the deadline in order to be included—even if time is tight this month. Made it about one-fourth through!

Mark Nemeth | Albuquerque, New Mexico | abqmark@gmail.com

The Seedling

#50 Stern of mood and proud

I think I mentioned last year that August is somehow inexplicably busy every year, and that has held true in 2025. I am scrambling to get out a tiny zine just hours before deadline, with no Dullstrand update, no comments, and no book reviews. I will try to catch up next time.

Dwellers on the Fringe of Civilization

The Eastlands Campaign | Session 3

Setting: Eastlands
GM: Mark Nemeth
Game System: D&D 5E

Player	*Character*	*Class*
James Schnedar	Destrian Marvane	wizard
	Karn Thorn	warlock
Joe Ring	Bristol	fighter
	Shadden Tuck	cleric
Polo Schnedar	Gruber Hawkstorm	sorcerer
	Mooria Zurka	ranger

Recap

The party has returned from a raid on a cavern complex southeast of Norvald, where they encountered a large goblin lair. The village chaplain of Norvald, Ivora, has assigned Shadden to escort a midwife to attend the birth of a pregnant woman in exile. A reward has been offered for someone to inform a wrongly convicted exile, Udargu, that his conviction has been vacated, but no one has sought him yet, owing to the difficulty of finding him in the wilderness.

Session 3

Since Shadden still had about 15 days before he had to leave to attend the birth of a pregnant woman in exile, he and his friends decided to seek Udargu, whose manslaughter conviction had been vacated because of newly discovered evidence. Barring unforeseen delay, they decided that there was just barely enough time to seek Udargu, for whom they had sympathy, in addition to desiring the reward. Before leaving, they inquired around town, learning that Udargu had once worked for their rancher acquaintance, Wylinga [*session 0*] and that in recent years he had been seen at a swap meet site north of Norvald, where exiles, daring merchants, and other remote dwellers meet a couple of times a year to exchange goods.

Arriving at Wylinga's ranch house, the party was cordially received. Wylinga recalled hiring Udargu many years in the past and described him as honest but hardheaded and difficult to get along with. She was aware of the swap meet, having occasionally sold cattle to merchants traveling thither, but she had never been there herself. She invited the party to spend the night on her ranch and recommended that they seek further information at Sunflower Tower, where they might encounter a merchant with more precise geographic knowledge of the northern regions.

They set off on the following morning, having an uneventful journey to Sunflower Tower, which had recently been transformed into an inn following the death of its long-tenanted former owner—a reclusive and irascible wizard—a few years ago. Sighting the tower, they approached cautiously, notwithstanding its generally positive contemporary reputation. Approaching he southernmost outbuilding, they peered inside, finding it to be a storage shed with a young man inside, apparently tidying up. The youth, Dwexar, was a simpleton employed by the innkeeper, and he instructed the party to seek lodgings at the tower. Arriving at the tower, still cautiously,

The Sunflower Tower. (Illustration created with Gemini)

they entered the main door and found themselves in the common room of an inn, conventional in appearance aside from its circular shape. The innkeeper, Trazidell, greeted them warmly and asked if they preferred to stay in the tower itself or in a newly constructed lodging house across the courtyard. Despite a small additional expense, they opted for the tower. The common room was populated mostly with expeditioners, along with a couple of merchants and their retinues.

Mooria struck up a conversation with the merchants, one of whom recalled Udargu from the previous fall's swap meet and was about to tell her the location of the swap meet site. At that moment, one of the inn's employees burst through the front door and yelled, "There's something coming—everybody outside!" The expeditioners hastened out the door, with the merchants exiting more reluctantly. In the sky to the north were two black, winged shapes approaching. As they got closer, it became apparent that there were two huge wyverns. The expeditioners took defensive positions, and the noncombatants looked terrified. Suddenly there was a deafening thunderclap, and a lightning bolt arced from the staff a woman in the crowd, striking the larger wyvern. It dropped almost to the earth before recovering and flying back the way it had come, followed by its companion. Everyone cheered and enthusiastically congratulated the woman who had discharged the lightning bolt; she remarked, beaming, that she had just recently gotten the staff and had never used it before.

Bristol and Shadden, who had positioned themselves on the south side of the courtyard, heard a faint noise, as of a distant person screaming, to the southeast. Following the sound, they discovered the stableboy, Dwexar, desperately clinging to the rim of an abandoned well. Bristol pulled him out, and Dwexar said he had forgotten about the well during all the excitement and fallen in. The party sent him back to the tower and spent a while investigating the well, which turned out to be nothing beyond a mundane abandoned well. Returning to the tower, they were hailed by Trazidell, who effusively thanked them for saving Dwexar, along with letting them know that their drinks for the rest of the night were on the house.

Mooria resumed her conversation with the merchant, who provided directions to the swap meet site and further remarked that he thought it very likely that Udargu lived in one of three nearby canyons, judging by the direction he had traveled upon his departure. In the common room, the assembled company was in sky-high spirits after the day's events, and the revelry showed no sign of abating. Mooria hoped for a chance to speak in private to the woman with the lightning staff, but she was both continuously surrounded by well-wishers and far on her way to getting smashed, owing to the innumerable drinks everyone kept buying her. After his ordeal, Dwexar became fascinated with Bristol and Shadden, hanging on every word of whatever adventuring stories they told or embellished.

Eventually the PCs retired for the evening. They were undisturbed throughout the night, and they headed down to the common room for breakfast in the morning, seeing one person still asleep on the floor and a few others looking bleary-eyed and headache-plagued, all owing to last night's festivities. Mooria recognized a companion of the wielder of the lightning staff and began talking to her. The other woman introduced herself as Mendalia, and, in the course of conversation, revealed that the staff, as well as a magical dagger she herself now bore, had come from their group's recent expedition to an ancient burial crypt in the foothills of Mount Sernec, far to the west.

The party set off eastward and arrived at the swap meet site in late morning. Identifying the three canyons where Udargu might live, they began with the northernmost one. In the late afternoon, they came upon an enclave on the north side of the canyon, blocked by the side of a well-constructed three-story masonry house abutting a rough stone wall, behind which they could see only a stream of smoke steadily rising. One of the inhabitants of the place was outside the wall. He hastened to the gate, nervously telling them to abide the arrival of "the majordomo." In a few minutes, the majordomo, Tuolin, arrived at the gate and answered their inquiries tersely but not impolitely. He denied that Udargu lived there and claimed not to know who he was. Noting the waning of the day, he invited the party, perhaps reluctantly, to stay for the night, cautioning that approval would have to be obtained from "the Mistress." He escorted them through the wall into a small compound consisting of the house, an adjacent laboratory, a garden, and a forge, from whence the smoke arose.

The party engaged the blacksmith in conversation, who reported that he had taken up the craft about two years ago, following the death of the compound's previous blacksmith. He was making horseshoes at the moment, but the forge area also contained a rack of well-made weapons. After returning to a sitting room on the house, the party was informed that dinner would be served outdoors, as it was the first day of the year warm enough for such practice. In reality, it was still a bit too cool, but the inhabitants of the enclave were excited to eat outside anyway, after a long winter cooped up indoors. The "Mistress" turned out to be a woman named Zarixi, who emerged from her laboratory and greeted the party warmly, explaining that her group was trying to build a community away from the stifling influence of the settled lands. She had no more to add about the possible location of Udargu. She did, however, inform the party that she would pay good money for any of several items required for magical recipes, including giant toad skin, wyvern tail, tiger eye, gecko tongue, and manticore heart, as well as for a supply of graphite, since, unlike

Dwexar clings to the edge of the abandoned well. (Illustration created with Reve)

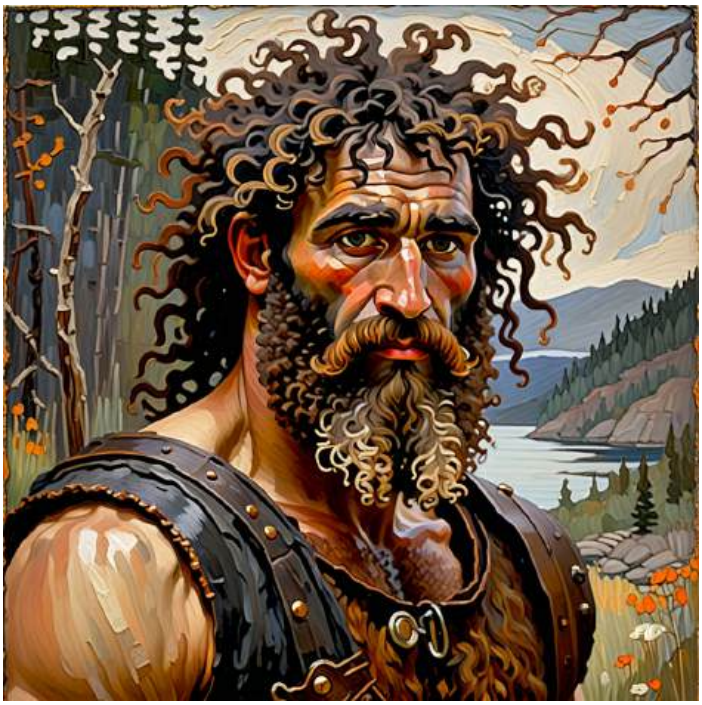
An owlbear lurks in the forest. (Illustration created with Reve)

most wizards, she used magical pencils rather than inks.

The party spent the night in comfort and departed early the next day. Exploring the next canyon to the south, the heard the sound of a large beast moving through the brush, then sighted an owlbear. Combat went surprisingly well, and they emerged unscathed. The quickly found the beast's lair, which contained no treasure and had apparently been picked through by someone else recently.

Continuing eastward, the encountered a brown bear in a narrow point of the canyon, chained so that it could not be passed easily. Destrian cast a spell to put the bear to sleep, and the party continued beyond it, coming to the end of a box canyon, within which was a well-tended garden, a barn, and pasturage for sheep and hogs. There were also two dogs that barked loudly, but Mooria used her skill with animals to keep them quiet. There was a ladder on the north wall of the canyon, leading to a cave opening about thirty feet up. The party climbed up, led by Bristol, who discovered a chamber with simple furnishings and a bad, in which a human-sized figure lay covered. Bristol snatched the blanket from the foot of the bed, escaping the snapping of a bear trap concealed beneath it.

As they emerged from the cave, they heard a gruff voice behind the garden wall, telling them to throw down their weapons and climb down. Most of the party obeyed, but Bristol advanced toward the wall, though without drawing his weapons, until an arrow landed at his feet, shot by a burly, unkempt man. This turned out to be Udargu, who demanded to know the party's business at his residence. The party informed him that his conviction had been vacated. Udargu was initially skeptical, but eventually became convinced. At this point, the party realized that, unless Udargu accompanied them back to Norvald, they had no way to confirm that they had delivered the message and claim their reward. Udargu was conflicted about leaving his hard-won home, but he agreed to go back to town with the party, as long as they were willing to have his livestock accompany the group and take the additional time that this would entail. This would leave no margin for delay with respect to the party's deadline to depart with the midwife, but they agreed to Udargu's terms. Fortunately, the trip proved uneventful, aside from an attack by a group of bugbears, whom Udargu himself quickly put to flight. They stopped at Wylinga's ranch on the return journey, and she agreed to temporarily board Udargu's livestock. Back in town, the party collected their reward and prepared for their imminent departure with the midwife.



Udargu has been away from civiliztion for a while. (Illustration created with Gemini)

Observations & Commentary

My observation and commentary on these sessions appears below.

Killer DM No Longer, or A 1/512 Chance Is Too Much

I was worried about the encounter with the owlbear potentially being a total party kill, expecting the party to try to find a clever way around it, and cautioning them about the difficulty before combat began. Instead, it was the easiest victory they've ever had. In part, this was attributable to lucky rolls on Grubor's *sorcerous blast*, for which rolling maximum damage on the first die allows you to roll an additional die, and so on; the player rolled four consecutive 8s (on d8), chaining the damage. In retrospect, we realized that he shouldn't have gotten more than two additional rolls, since the spell description states that the number of extra dice is limited to the relevant ability modifier. Then we began to wonder why this rule needs to exist, since rolling lots of consecutive 8s happens so infrequently that it can't possibly unbalance the game and, instead, makes for an occasional memorable incident. Anyway, after my recent experiences (as reported in issue #1) nearly killing the party, this session had the opposite problem. I'm not sure whether to attribute this to luck or to continued lack of experience balancing encounters.

Exposition vs. Action

As I wrote before, I feel a need to include more exposition as a GM than I seem to receive as a player, and I'm not sure if I'm doing something wrong or if it's just a matter of style. This session, I was (and remain) apprehensive about including so much noncombat activity; it's hard to tell if the players like it or not. In view of long-term campaign narrative, I think it's important to establish that the civilization of the setting is (usually) communitarian and cooperative, rather than overwhelmingly corrupt, as some of the players seem more accustomed to. I think they're starting to pick up on this, so I hope I can lay off of emphasizing it in upcoming sessions. On the other hand, it may not have been wise to plan an adventure in which the climactic encounter involved trying *not* to fight the potential adversary (Udargu). Or maybe it was exactly the right thing to do. It's hard to know.

Sleeping in the Wizard's Tower

The Sunflower Tower owes its very existence to a previous discussion in *A&E* about repurposing of buildings. At the time, some people had expressed curiosity about how the players would react to having their characters stay in an inn that was formerly a wizard's tower. Would the be paranoid? Curious? Something else? It turned out not to be much of an issue at all. They paid one more gp to stay in the tower, didn't seem paranoid, and seemed to mildly enjoy the novelty.

It's funny about parents. They work so hard so their children will be better than they were, and then they're a little bit jealous when they are.

—Oakley Hall

Age of Menace

Issue 240

brian.misiaszek@gmail.com

Brian Christopher Misiaszek

5 Livingstone Drive,
Dundas, ON, L9H 7S3
CANADA
Tel 905-627-5496

Copyright Brian Misiaszek 2025

From Our Last Episode...

Here in Ontario it has continued to be very hazy from far off wildfires located in our Canadian prairie provinces. Not only does it smell some days like a campfire, sunsets have been interesting but there's been some rather interesting orange colours to the Moon which I've managed to snap a few photos. So much for claims that climate change is a hoax.

Whirlwind Wanders, Hats & Monster Manuals

I aborted my original vacation plan to visit PulpFest in Pittsburgh in August because I'm like many other Canadians avoiding travel to the US for the next few years because of unfriendly political events there (and maybe never again if things do not improve in 3.5 years from the current *Caesarism* form of political leadership.

Instead, my wife Caroline and I recently took a whirlwind 30-hour escape to Niagara-on-the-Lake (NOTL). The highlight was *Anything Goes* at the Shaw Festival, Cole Porter's music, razor-sharp dancing, slapstick timing, and glorious 1930s Art Deco style all firing at once.

The next day I made a pilgrimage to *Beau Chapeau*, my semi-local go-to hat shop also located in NOTL, not only did they steam refurbish one of my old hats, entirely by accident I ended up purchasing two brand-new hats!

That week also included other happy diversions. In London, Ontario, *Attic Books* yielded a haul of lovely vintage paperbacks.

LA Mood a game store also in London provided an excuse to burn a gift certificate on a *Dragonlance* TSR *Monstrous Compendium* (MC) binder that oddly had 'Vol. 2 written on it' and another binder with *Spelljammer* on the side. This led me down a rabbit hole of TSR's confusing volume numbering, discovering mismatched binders, misplaced dividers, and the peculiar fact that there are, in practice, *two* Volume 2s. Any veteran D&D collector will know the pain.

In the end I came away wiht the 'Dragonlance' MC (w/ binder & 4 dividers & cardboard sleeve), MC3 'Forgotten Realms' (0 dividers), MC5 'Greyhawk' (0 dividers), MC 'Kura Tura' (0 dividers), both *Spelljammer* releases MC7 & MC9 (4+4 dividers). Not bad for that $50 gift certificate.

I capped things off with a visit to my hometown of Barrie; brunch with a friend, and, family time with my Mom and my sister. All in all, a fine few day of musical theatre, hats, books, and the kind of gaming archaeology only RPG obsessives appreciate.

Havana Horror: *The Mazzora*

I had been doing some researching some real-life locations set in 1930s Havana Cuba. Here's one.

Mazorra aka **Casa General de Dementes** (*General House of the Insane)*

Seventeen kilometers south of Havana, hidden behind tobacco and sugarcane fields and linked by rail to the capital's heart, stands *La Casa General de Dementes*, Cuba's only insane asylum, better known to the public as the ***Mazorra***. The facility began life in 1854, when the old slave plantation *Potrero Ferro* was purchased to become Cuba's first dedicated asylum. Its namesake, Don José Mazorra, a notorious slave trader, would lend the place not just his name, but his malign shadow.

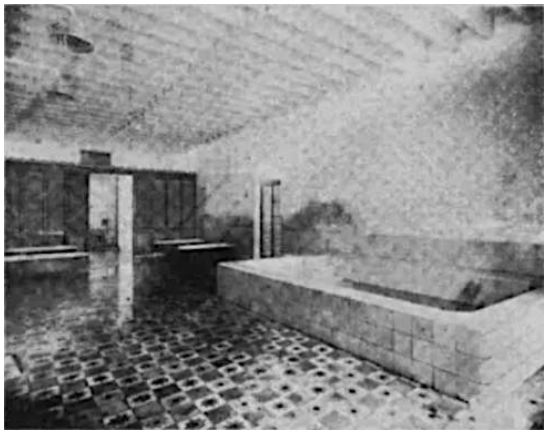
When it opened in 1857, the Mazorra was less a hospital than a human warehouse. Within its walls gates were not only the those with severe mental health disorders, such as those with dementia praecox (schizophrenia), and the depressive melancholics, but also the epileptic, the "senile demented", the "feeble-minded," and anyone else society wished to hide.

There were no real treatments, only restraints, chains, padded cells, and the guards' clubs. Even the nurses from the religious order *Sisters of Charity* carried whips until they left at the end of the Spanish American War. While the Sister's kept things immaculately clean, they could only pray for those who were unwell. In the final years of Spanish rule, conditions were so dire that nearly a thousand inmates starved to death before the Americans occupied Havana in 1899 after winning the *Spanish-American War*.

The appalled American occupiers assigned to the asylum documented emaciated and malnourished patients whose frail and cachectic appearances were not unlike those observed in concentration camps located in Europe decades later. Under General Brooke, the U.S. brought army doctors and engineers to rebuild Mazorra's crumbling pavilions and clean its filthy wards.

A Group of Cuban Nurses

Hope for reform after two U.S. occupations (1899–1902, 1906–1909) faded fast from a combination of public apathy & superstition, lack of funds, and decades of corrupt Cuban oversight, Mazorra remained more prison than hospital. Of the thousands confined behind its walls, only a handful ever saw a doctor. Treatments were crude: straitjackets, morphine injections, laudanum liquors, barbiturates, or endless hours in icy or scalding baths.



Under the guise of *ergotherapy* aka *moral theapy* inmates worked the old plantation fields, planting sugarcane and rolling tobacco, laundering linens, or sewing clothes, all unpaid and forced labour echoing slavery's ghost. Lucky patients resided in barracks close to the fields and did not have to return to the main hospital dormitories to try and sleep and eat against a background of bedlam. Slavery itself had only ended in Cuba in 1886; in Mazorra's fields, little seemed to change.

In the 1920s and '30s, new state campaigns branded homosexuality and Afro-Cuban religions like *Santería* as madness. Brujas, priests, and gay men alike vanished behind Mazorra's gates. Some were beaten to death. Some were raped. Many were rented out as barefoot laborers. Doctors who spoke up were fired, silenced, and some even simply vanished

In 1926, a hurricane smashed roofs, flattened the women's pavilions, and gave the new President Gerardo Machado an excuse to rebuild, and polish his increasingly autocratic image. By 1929 new wards rose for men, women, and even children, though children had long lived there alongside their institutionalized mothers. An X-ray suite, lab, autopsy hall, and a bright new journal trumpeted "modern care."

Also in 1929, Machado installed his cousin, *Dr. Miguel Rodríguez Machado* as Director of the Mazorra. A veterinarian by profession, he was supported by an Administrative Supervisor named *Captain Alberto Gandía*, also a hand-picked appointment. That same year they arranged for a 'Festival of Mazorra' an open house where thousands attended: a band of inmates played polite music, while Havana's elite accompanied by adoring journalists toured the spruced-up wards and replanted grounds. The papers praised Cuba's "modern madhouse." But behind the whitewashed facades, nothing changed.

Director's Manse at the Mazorra

By the early 1930s patient enrolment increased to 3000, but often the Mazorra's census was well over that, with some additional 200 to 300 added patients above that official cap every month. Mazorra was still a dumping ground for the island's unwanted poor, and later for political prisoners of the Machado dictatorship. If you were wealthy and white, you went to private clinics. But if you were not, you went to the publicly run Mazorra, and often never came out. Disease breakouts were common, the absence of proper clothing in the colder months had some die of exposure, and food set aside to feed patients often

was diverted to fatten Director Machado's prize pigs located near one of the Men's dormitories.

When Geraldo Machado's government finally fell to revolution and the tyrant fled in August 12th 1933, Havana's muzzled press turned on the asylum like sharks to blood. In the October1933 issue of the Cuban magazine *Bohemia* was a harrowing and grisly 14-page article complete with nightmarish images called "***The Horrors of the Mazorra"***. Journalists, at great personal risk, documented the daily atrocities. From their expose "Horrors of the Mazorra" the reader learned of the most harrowing of details how under the last ~3 years of the brutal dictatorship of Gerardo Machado (1925–1933), Cuba's Mazorra Insane Asylum became one of the darkest places in the Caribbean *(and the more sensible reader may wish to skip these).*

- **Corruption & Nepotism:** Mazorra's permanent staff was a crony nest, with many orderlies, guards, clerical staff, cooks, etc., being paid to do very little. Hospital jobs bought loyalty and votes in the nearby town of *Santiago de las Vegas* not far from President Machado's private plantation home.
- **Devastating Chronic Neglect:** Many patients were forced to sleep on iron beds with bare wires mattresses but no sheets or blankets. Food meant for patients were diverted to feed pigs and patients starved, with several dying any given day from this. Patients who would soil themselves, so-called "Dirty patients" had even their dirty rags of clothing removed and were locked naked into wards with no working toilets with other fecal incontinent patients; they had not even such wire beds, just the concrete floor to sleep on. Other patients who had clothing issued to them found they were often riddled with fleas, lice, and other vermin.
- **Forced Labor & Theft:** Mazorra's unpaid in-patients and inmates worked in the institution's fields, quarries, and gardens. Sewing and shoemaking shops produced goods for sale, and even some patients rolling cigars branded as "Yániz's Figs" which were later sold on Havana's black market. Stone, lime, and brick meant for the hospital building upgrades & repairs were diverted to build private villas and mansions for Cuba's military generals. An extravagant "park" was constructed by inmates, but the wages authorized by the Cuban Congress for its construction vanished; the money used to line the hospital leadership's' pockets.
- **Systematic Torture:** Violent patients were restrained with iron cuffs & leather "manguillos," used a half-century earlier. Patients were beaten with chains, deprived of food, or left naked on cold floors until they developed skin ulcers that became infected. Starvation cells, solitary confinement in straight jackets, cold-water torture, and even summary mutilations were routinely employed by sadistic staff.
- **Abuse Without End:** Some staff at the Mazorra extorted families of chronic patients, demanding bribes for food or medicine. Others preyed on other staff and coerced nurses and employees' wives for sexual favors. Some tortured patients for sport; one patient, a fellow former male nurse, had their back repeatedly burned with cigarettes until raw. Complaints were silenced; whistleblowers were threatened and even had murder plots against them
- **Starvation & Death:** Inmates clawed over banana peels in garbage heaps. Half-cooked grains and raw pork caused constant gastrointestinal disease. The "Enteric Pavilion" was a revolving door: patients with catastrophic dysentery improved just enough to be thrown back into starvation and relapse until they finally died of dehydration from dysentery on faeces smeared iron beds. Sadistic co-patients like *Jeremías 'The Persian' Yobama*, an overseas murderer declared insane rather than executed, became an unpaid hospital torturer-executioner,
- **Children's Pavilion Abuses:** Even children with chronic mental health issues who were incarcerated in the Mazorra were neglected. Some of these unfortunates were subjected to unspeakable abuse and exploitation under the watch of indifferent or complicit guards.

Bohemia magazine's exposé of in the October 15th 1933 issue shocked the nation. After the fall of Machado's regime, Dr. Arturo Vilela, a young Mazorra psychiatrist was appointed the new Director of Mazorra and tried desperately to drag the asylum out of its nightmare.

When interviewed by *Bohemia* for their 1933 exposé, Dr. Vilela described how he had begun the Herculean task of classifying psychiatric disorders properly for all the patients he was ultimately responsible for, paid for stolen medications out of his own pocket, and tried to purge the worst criminals from the payroll. In return for his efforts, the new Director faced repeated bouts of sabotage, arson and even an assassination plot in return, forcing him, as he put it without any exaggeration to "…defend my life with a pistol in my hand. He resigned within weeks later.

Soon after there was documented an October 1933 uprising at the Mazorra had to be suppressed by Cuban soldiers. Dr. Vilela himself was briefly jailed in 1934 for allegedly plotting to speak against the new government. No matter who was in charge in Cuba, the Mazorra asylum endured, newly repainted, but never truly reformed.

Los Hombres de Mazorra

Rapacity as a system. "The Persian," a historical character. The "goat" of the shoe. A ring that was a family heirloom. A theft of five pesos — that mobilizes the top brass. Torture as a means of reduction. Causes of Mazorra's high mortality rate. Professional thievery? Hunger! In the midst of slavery, Coloma, king of vice. Slain in life. Yániz's figs.

PHOTOS BY FUNCASTA.]

Machado's credit is the saddest of all the feats recorded in Cuban history, and one of the blackest that the annals of cruelty in the entire world will record, from the days of the arsonist of Rome until today. If Machado and his henchmen had limited themselves to strangling citizens' rights, their deli... This would have been identical to that of other saintly tyrants who have left dark traces in the pages of history, but although aware of the value of the free expression of the will of men and peoples, we dare to affirm, without fear of exaggeration, that it was the least of the crimes committed by the band of heartless men who held power for years. What gives Machado and his men the "capacity of daily superior men" is the cruelty and zeal with which they began to impose and apply methods of torture - and suffering on the people, whose only crime consisted of opposing their continued unrestricted disposal

Edmundo GONZALEZ, a private who serves with the prison laborers of the perfect crushes, has been cited for the crimes of despicable

vicious people

Mazorra Park, which, despite being made with mace-like supplied by the same gang and the orders of labor of the medium, ends up looking, under the administration of Supervisor Gandía, the handsome son of western Proconsul prizes

cato or restraint of what belonged to everyone. The procedures applied against the Cuban people are so refined, so exquisite in their cruelty, that Laos has to repeat it again; they have no parallel in world history. Nero, even had a moment of hesitation before setting fire to Rome and ordering the massacre of the eris-

This is how most of the beds were in the time of the Machadato. One of the members of the "Mella" Agricultural Colony tries to rest on the broken wire.

Joaquín Peláez Nuño, who is almost a pint, taken there for having attempted to commit two serious crimes, perhaps as a consequence of the injuries he suffered, has little idea to impose himself, free from the victim of unspeakable abuses

THE HAPPINESS OF UNCONSCIOUSNESS

Despite all the pains they've suffered over the years, this mad couple has fun playing cards.

The Enteric Pavilion, one of the most horrifying places in Mazo, whose beds are no longer even dressed. These individuals, skeletal and with dislocated limbs, are victims of the awful, beloved one more hard blows treatment given to the insane. On ... go, eight or ten were released each day.

the most bloodthirsty, and the ... of the French Revolution had moments of cowards, tyrants and ... mentors have all felt the bruising of others.

a more or less broad conscience. In realizing their enormity, Machado and his people have been tormenting a society in all its stages ... and spheres for eight years, without having had the slightest hesitation, without having experienced the slightest remorse, without the daily routine of their placid lives being altered, because the faintest shadow had crossed them.

Dr. Arturo VILELA, who resigned his position a few days ago, under pressure from the intrigues of those he has rightly displaced—as he tells us—at his desk, ... re-reading files and trying to argue be that last, perhaps the true character of a hospital for the insane

of a thought of disapproval. In the Model Prison, men were led to the casemate, where they were prey for hungry opposites or treacherous bullets, if not for the endemic diseases of the overcrowded lands, in Atarés,

the most inquisitorial procedures of torture and slow murder were applied. In the Women's Prison, hunger, violent punishment, and the most brutal threats were the factors that turned those unfortunate women into beasts of a harassed herd that cursed existence. But all that constitutes nothing more

than a trifle compared to the Dantesque hell that was the Mazorra Insane Hospital. The political prisoners tortured in Atarés, and the prisoners co-

It's not a dead man rising from the grave. It's a madman, Manuel's, who doesn't even have the best ... made so he doesn't die of cold like so many others

in this half body and on this face, all the sufferings of that nefarious era seem to be engraved.

Another face for study. It seems to be ... a madness inclination older

A figure that resembles a specter from beyond the grave is that of an inmate of Mazorra who suffers from intestinal ailments caused by the terrible diet he was given. Likewise, there are more than one hundred individuals condemned to die slowly if the revolutionary ... leaders of the Bugre do not perform a miracle.

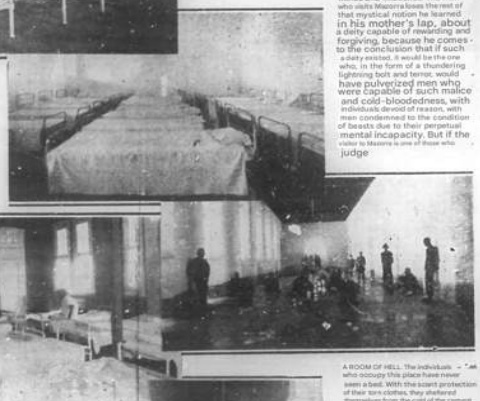
Domingo COLOMA, a peaceful-minded man, was already suffering from the illness that is currently in ... created "comment" by the couple in charge of punishing ... unworthy of our time and our civilization. Who is the moved alarmed him for the examination, such a situation ... arises, he said that if not for ... on see, his prisoners would ... have fallen.

The men martyred in the Presidio Modelo were conscious men who, if at least mental ... malice did not justify the good crimes of their prisoners, explain that those mutilated and mistreated were able to experience all the pain and suffering that their victims ... les de para ra ham. Likewise, the ... women confined in Guanabacoa ... mental quality were allowed to suffer all the terror that their armed guards could inflict ... with their skillful ... tortures. But in the case that everyone says that a child of relative mental normality did not suffer as much as here that they tune

The misfortune of not being able to think and reason like us. The madmen, who carry their own hell in their brains, those who feel that the machine of their sensory system has stopped forever in front of an agency that tortured them when they were ordinary people, were subjected, in the ... era of Machadato, to the most terrible plagues. There is no word strong enough to describe the set of evil procedures to which these men were subjected, and there is no word vigorous enough to hide the anger of the people, after seeing and feeling all the calamities that weighed on that immense population of

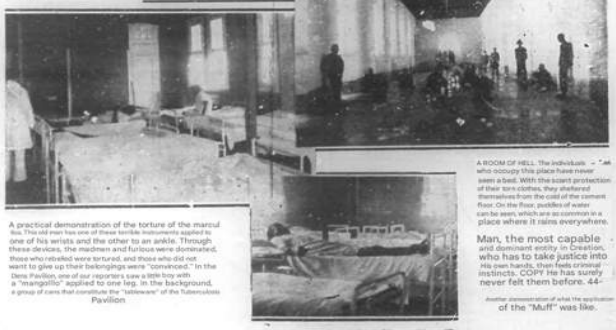
Gentlemen, is it right that the inmates of Mazorra have occupied these beds for years, without even a sheet and most of them being naked? And thank goodness this Section didn't even have chamberlains

minds and imbeciles. The man who visits Mazorra loses the rest of that mystical notion he learned in his mother's lap, about a deity capable of rewarding and forgiving, because he comes - to the conclusion that if such a deity existed, it would be the one who, in the form of a thundering lightning bolt and terror, would have pulverized men who were capable of such malice and cold-bloodedness, with individuals devoid of reason, with men condemned to the condition of beasts due to their perpetual mental incapacity. But if the visitor to Mazorra is one of those who judge



This is a section where the double beds, in addition to being infested with bedbugs, do not even have a sheet to cover their occupants.

Ezica Section, which Dr. Vilela's efforts managed to make a presentable pHO with the au05 canvas dress shows the short distance that exists between an individual and another and the ease with which, if there is no adequate force, madmen incur the reprehensible acts.



A practical demonstration of the torture of the marcul tica. This old man has one of these terrible instruments applied to one of his wrists and the other to an ankle. Through these devices, the madmen and furious were dominated, those who rebelled were tortured, and those who did not want to give up their belongings were "convinced." In the Dens Pavilion, one of our reporters saw a little boy with a "mangalito" applied to one leg. In the background, a group of cans that constitute the "tableware" of the Tuberculosis Pavilion

A ROOM OF HELL. The individuals - "...es who occupy this place have never seen a bed. With the scant protection of their torn clothes, they sheltered themselves from the cold of the cement floor. On the floor, puddles of water can be seen, which are so common in a place where it rains everywhere.

Man, the most capable and dominant entity in Creation, who has to take justice into His own hands, then feels criminal instincts. COPY He has surely never felt them before. 44-

Another demonstration of what the application of the "Muff" was like.

This photograph, which seems to capture an impression of the exterior of the temple of Jerusalem, when all the human rags of the surrounding area came to seek health from the miraculous hand of Jesus, is a Women's Section of the Mazorra Hospital for the Insane. Thus, lying on the bare floor, riddled with flea and wearing rags, these women, disinherited by fortune and the piety of men, have lived

lived in all its existence, Mazorra is the only place that has the strange quality of awakening destructive instincts in men. Mazorra makes us feel the deepest disgust for life. Mazorra makes us lose sight of even the need for sustenance. Mazorra is the cursed hell that Machado created and enlarged, to forever embitter

This face may have much of that of a madman, but it has much more of that of a hungry man longing for a meal. And this exists in the Hospital for the Insane in Cuba, where a deposit of 17 cents per inmate assures them, at least, the right to a piece of bread.

The memory of all those who have the misfortune of having to spend ... the night in a newspaper suggests that if one day the Almeña falls into our hands, let Mazorra, that gloomy and evil den of decay and destruction, be the place that is given to it. And let it be in Mazorra where

Another Women's Section. The unfortunate woman, lying on the table where the slop they have pre-eaten is served, let out desperate cries that they are hungry

The Children's Pavilion, where almost bald individuals live promiscuously, constitutes a dangerous ... one but place. Here we are told that the most brutal scenes were recorded, ...

acquire the awareness of experiencing for themselves the tortures that he and his never-enough-miserable hitmen applied to those who, for having lost him

Scenes like these abound in the Niñes Pavilion. The skeletal emaciation, the bulging eyes, the open little mouth, the monstrous nails: the horror of hunger, the despair of abandonment. It ... would be better not to have been born, a wretched creature

Mapping the Mazorra:

I found online a cropped section of an ~1890s map that clearly shows the *Villanueva–Bejucal Railway* cutting diagonally across the grounds of the Mazorra Asylum. Unfortunately, the source and legend for this map was no listed (see what Google Translate did with an image I uploaded), Much had had changed over a quarter century especially after the rebuild after1926 hurricane, with at least seven new major hospital buildings added. But nowhere online could I locate a map of either the old or current grounds of this Cuban psychiatric institution.

Using satellite images of the current Cuban Psychiatric Hospital and measurements to align this with the map above, I cross-referenced building descriptions and locations and made educated guesses to create an approximation of the Mazorra complex (see page 7) as it likely appeared in the early 1930s.

Isolated places like the Mazorra were like a town in many ways, with their own fire department, garbage services, post office, etc., with some staff even living on. For now, I've excluded interior maps of individual buildings, as they would be largely speculative.

General Features

The distributed pavilion style layout was supposed to prevent the spread of communicable disease, and because of theories that nature can be healing provided access to gardens and trees and promoting a sense of order and control.

The walls that surround the 12.5 acres of the main part of the Mazorra rise to a height of four meters, built from bricks fired on-site in the estate's own brickworks, located at the southeastern edge of the original plantation grounds where a natural clay bed had been found. Throughout the property, railway tracks and other boundaries are marked by woven iron fencing, also standing four meters high. The walls surround only the main pavilions, and administrative buildings, and do not surround or contain the Mazorra's ranch buildings, barns and patient dormitories a half km to the north east.

Main entrance to the Mazorra: on the east side, leading to Boyeras Road. Originally double gate for carriages, it was later expanded to accommodate cars, buses, and supply trucks. The gate is framed by two five-meter-tall masonry gateposts, with "Casa General de Dementes" displayed on the left and "Mazorra" on the right. A small gatehouse stands to the north of the entrance; it is staffed continuously but is normally locked between 9 p.m. and 7 a.m.

Additional gates allow vehicles to enter the grounds from the east and to cross the railway tracks. These are primarily supervised to prevent accidents involving patients or inmates rather than to restrict escape. To the north and south, narrower pedestrian "side gates" provide access for staff, patients, and visitors. These gates are kept locked mainly to prevent patients from wandering off rather than to confine them.

"Departamento de Varones" (Men's Department)

Large rectangular block on the left of the railway line made up of dormitories, workrooms, and wards for different categories of male patients.

"Departamento de Mujeres" (Women's Dept.)

Women were separately from the men for moral, cultural, and practical reasons. They did laundry and kitchen work for the asylum as unpaid labor. Some even had their children live with them. Their dormitories and treatment areas are in the rectangular block on the right side of the railway (note these were almost demolished from a hurricane in 1926 and rebuilt

Mazorra Railway & Train Depot

The rail line that bisects the grounds of the Mazorra made it possible to bring in workers and supplies to construct along classic 19th-century "pavilion" asylum architectural motifs for this facility, with separate wings to allow for segregation by sex, diagnosis, or behavior.

The same railway later served to transport patients, provisions, and staff easily between the asylum and the capital, and to support the new towns growing to support the hospital staff of doctors, nurses, and support staff including orderlies and guards for the psychiatric facility.

Routinely trains can be heard rumbling between the Male and Female Departments all through the day

Mazorra

Casa General de Dementes

Map legend

Clinical Departments

- M Main Assessment Clinic
- R Hospital Receiving
- Doctors Quarters
- RN Quarters
- MO Medical Offices
- MR Medical Records
- ID Intercurrent Diseases
- SI Sub-infirmary
- IW Isolation Ward
- † TB ward
- EP Enteric pavilion
- *X-ray department*
- *Dental clinic*
- Hospital Morgue
- Telephone switchboard

Mens/Womens

- *A Violento / Refractario*
- *B Dementia praecox & Psicosis paranoide*
- *C Deficiencia mental*
- *D Demencia / Trastorno orgánico cerebral & Epilepsia*
- *E Melancolia / Neurastenia*
- *F Neurosis de angustia/Histeria*
- *G Psicopatia moral*
- *H Alcoholismo / Toxicomania*
- *I Locura maniaco-depresiva*
- *J Parálisis general progresiva*
- *K Caso agudo*
- *L Docile Chronic dormatories*

- † Mazorra Chapel
- CW Children's ward
- Children's School
- NS Nursing School
- Nursing Quarters
- TR Training school for Girls
- Head RN
- DM Director's Manse
- Su Superintendent
- PO **Post Office**
- *VP Visitors pavilion*
- *VC Visitor's Canteen*
- *Vs Visitors Store*
- *VR Visitors railway platform*
- *VQ Visiting VIP quarters*
- *Guardpost*
- *Locked gate*
- Abandoned

- *Kitchen*
- *Mess/staff dining*
- *O Orderly/Guard quarters*
- *W Patient Workshops*
- *Storage/outbuilding/shed*
- *Powerhouse*
- *Maintenance/Repair*
- *railway platform*
- *Laundry*
- *Garage*
- *Firestation*
- *Cemetery preparation*
- *Cemetary chapel*
- *Incinerator*
- *Vegetable gardens*
- *Wall / fence*
- *Railway track*

and night between *Havana* and *Bejucal*, but the Mazorra passenger trains they only depart 4 times daily; from Havana in the morning arriving at 9 am and 11:20 am, with returns back to Havana at 6:35 and leave 8:35 weekdays, and only the 9 am arrival and 20:35 departure on weekends. The other trains that pass-through carry mostly freight, but they do slow down passing through the Mazorra. There is a water tower south of the facility and a depot for delivering supplies and for picking up agricultural products just south as well.

Mazorra Chapel: This area dates to when Mazorra was still a plantation; the surrounding buildings were once slave barracks. Afterward, the *Sisters of Mercy* repurposed them while working here from the 1870s until 1898. The main manse later burned, but its cellars—and those of the other buildings—remain sealed off underground and difficult to access. The chapel still stands, its original well beside it, and is served by a Catholic priest who visits on Sundays and twice more each week.

Mazorroa Cemetery: In the far southwest corner of the Mazorra grounds lies an area avoided by staff and patients alike. Thousands of dead have been interred here over the past 7 decades. An outbuilding handles chemical cremation with lime for patients who died of infectious disease, though most are buried on-site. Wooden markers have largely rotted away after a half century, making for much guesswork who is interred exactly where, and any coffins discovered have their conents are emptied into a nearby ossuary, a deep pit near the cemetery chapel filled with bones.

Demographics: Although the Mazorra was meant to admit patients from all walks of life, most came from Cuba's underclasses. A 1929 study found two-thirds were poor peasants or day laborers, with only a small minority of skilled workers. By 1931, records showed a patient population that was predominantly male (roughly 4 men to 3 women) and included many foreigners, immigrants (Spanish & Caribbean), and Cubans of color.

Black and mulatto patients were significantly overrepresented; 42% of men and 47% of women—compared to their 27.2% share of Cuba's population. Asians were rare (74 men, 1 woman). White patients were three times more likely to have no recorded diagnosis, suggesting harsher scrutiny of non-white patients.

Mortality was high: about 1% of inpatients died each month from infectious diseases such as gastroenteritis and respiratory illness, around 30 deaths monthly, and rising to more than 2% during the 3 winter months.

Using the Mazorra for Rolegaming

Cuba's *Mazorra* of the 1920s and 1930s can be a used not only as a destination for Keepers/GMs for a self-contained role-gaming scenario but can also be used as a place to re-locate PCs who have fallen into madness due to catastrophic exposure to elements of the Mythos or worse. In addition to the Mazorra's history and site plan, some generic encounters, and details of possible patients/inmates* one could meet up with follow.

Generic Mazorra Encounters: outdoors

1. Returned patient escapee, badly beaten, dragged in by guards who look like they have also been badly beaten in a fight.
2. Massive, supervised walk of 200 patients with one guard and one orderly; one patient suddenly makes a break for it, but staff do nothing; if asked says that "The dogs will track them down as usual."
3. From an open window above, a tin cup drops and clatters at your feet. Inside on a slip of paper is written *HELP* in three different languages
4. Horrible smelling laundry wagon, pulled by four gaunt patients, rolls past with soiled smocks is all in a heap. Some are blood smeared, others riddled with holes that look they are from guns.
5. Group of patients in numbered grey smocks looking up humming in perfect unison
6. A patient dressed in impeccable clothing is wearing a papier mâché crown, and everyone, including staff doctors and orderlies, bow to him and call him 'El Rey' (The King); if PCs do not respectfully bow, he flies into a rage.*
7. Mazorra firetruck slowly drives past heading back w/smoke smudged firemen; they have put out a small fire set in one of the outbuildings, the 5th fire this week
8. Two patients are scrubbing out strange non-Spanish words on the inside of the external wall of the asylum
9. A patient is dressed like the Virgin Mary is seen strolling followed by 2d6 adoring patients.*
10. Two guards argue over whose turn it is to break up a nearby screaming match of patients.

Generic Mazorra Ward/Pavilion Encounters:

1. Two patients brawl, then a huge black male patient shuffles slowly forward & with one blow the aggressor falls to the ground unconscious! If PCs try to intervene as the man shuffles off a fourth patient will attempt to pick their pocket.*
2. A patient offers to sell you their "cure" for madness, which appears to be half a cup of cloudy water smelling faintly of raw latex rubber.
3. Patient seen stealing from other patient a sharpened spoon covered in dried blood
4. Patient mistakes a PC for a loved one and pleads to "take me home now!" If they try to talk, they may gain the attention of other patients.
5. Scuffle among a group of patients spills weird contraband: fragile bird skull, bent spoons, seashells, frantic writing; they are from 2 rival cults that have sprung up inside the Mazorra.
6. A line of patients stands silently against a wall, each holding a chipped empty metal bowl
7. A patient carefully sweeps the floor, stopping every few minutes to bow to passers-by.

8. Four patients play an animated game using playing cards, laughing then groaning; if the cards are looked at, all of them are different in their backings but all depict various Jokers.
9. A patient tries to get a PC to deliver a letter for them to his brother in Havana; the letter inside appears completely blank but is in fact written in lemon juice and is a lucid request
10. A patient is heard muttering over and over what appears to be names in English. If the PCs listen in, it's all *their names*, over and over.

Generic Mazorra Main Clinic Encounters:

1. RN nervously counts syringes aloud before locking them away. A successful Listen roll hears him muttering "Why is there an extra one day and then one missing the next?"
2. A patient dressed like a Napoleon is seen strutting along in a hallway. *
3. Two porters gossip loudly while tray of food cools nearby; or those who speak Spanish they seem to be talking about someone who has mysteriously vanished from their padded room despite their straight jacket. If they notice anyone listening, they will immediately stop and start passing out food trays.
4. A faint smell of formaldehyde lingers in a corridor, and staff can be head whispering about a recent "incident in the medical museum." Several dissected specimens pickled in formaldehyde have been gone missing from their containers over the past month, almost enough parts to be the bulk of an entire body.
5. What seems to be rainwater drips steadily into a rusted bucket in the middle of the corridor
6. A heavy door slams somewhere below, the lights flicker, followed by muffled screams then silence.
7. A smell of strong bleach emanates from a locked door, but no one answers your knock; if forced open there is only bare room with a suspiciously clean patch on the floor and one wall.
8. A pair of orderlies push a rattling medicine cart, handing out pills (salt tablets) without water.
9. A patient is strapped into a chair, rocking slightly, eyes fixed on the ceiling.
10. A doctor walks by with a group of 3 trainees, speaking loudly. "The patient was found to have swallowed more than two dozen keys and they had to be removed surgically. Some of the keys were from hospital wards that had been walled in 1926", and "...there was also a strange kind of ivory chess pieces unlike any other kind I've seen before, that also went into our little museum!"

An RPG Roster of Mazorra Inpatients

The following are several psychiatric patients whose backgrounds could be hooks for scenarios based at the Mazorra or be added to other psychiatric asylum or even prison scenarios set in the early 1930s. I've abbreviated full stats for these in order to keep to the E&A page cap.

Gaspar '*General Napoleon*' Olivares*:* 65yo M, retired history professor; Mazorra patient convinced he is Napoleon.

Gaspar is a delusional Cuban man who moves about through the grounds of the Mazorra with eerie dignity utterly convinced he is *Napoleon* being held in exile by his enemies in France. Gaspar's thought disorder has an unsettling coherence: he has clearly studied military history and, when pressed, can rattle off in encyclopaedic detail unnervingly sound tactical ideas from his adopted namesake.

In the time he has been at the Mazorra, he has been observed using his charisma and charm with other 'loyal troops' (fellow inmates) to have him join his "wargames" for have them march in formation with frightening obedience and skill. He is planning an escape by using his loyal troops as a diversion with the aid of more coherent fellow patients.

He may aid investigators trying to escape using his own carefully arranged plan he has kept under wraps until the proper time. However, if they mock him, he'll denounce the investigators as spies for England and have his loyal troops 'attend to such traitors'.

STR 50 **CON** 40 **SIZ** 55 **DEX** 60 **INT** 75 **APP** 70 **POW** 60 **EDU** 95 **SAN** 25 **HP** 13
DB/Build: 0 **Move:** 8 **MP:** 12 **Luck:** 25
Combat:
Brawl 30% (15/6), dmg 1D3+1D4;
Dodge 35% (17/7)
Skills: Persuade 60%, Intimidate 45%, Firearms (Handgun) 40%, History (Military) 80%
Languages: Spanish 80%, English 60%, French 30%
Pulp Talent: Inspiring Oratory (can rally or even agitate individuals or groups into action)
Insanity (Delusion) *He is Napoleon Bonaparte;* Compulsively issuing military orders. Keeper; He *may roll History (Military)* to predict enemy actions; on success, Keeper can reveal the opponent's next intended move (or grant him and allies +1 MOV or +1 damage die in the first round). <> Once per session grants allies a bonus die battle strategy, group tactics. <> If investigators do not heed his military advice he will go into a rage if he fails a POW and attack
Back story:

- **Bio:** Veteran, military historian, & fanatic player of H.G. Wells' "Little Wars" his mind was shattered in the same car accident where his beloved wife Josephine died last year. After he emerged from his coma and learning this, he was no longer Prof. Olivares and instead Napoleon.
- **Description:** Older man, average height, wears a moth-eaten vintage French military coat (he once wore to a costume party) hung with bottle-cap medals, alarm-clock pendant, and rooster-feather fireman's helmet
- **Traits:** Charismatic, Brooding.
- **Motivation:** Escape, find his beloved Josephine

Armor: 1 point (from heavy military coat)

The General and The King

Reynaldo "El Rey" Fontanilla: *The "King of Spain".*

47-yo delusional inmate convinced he is the deposed King Alfonso XIII of Spain. To staff, patients, and strangers alike he issues "royal decrees" in Spanish, French, and English, appointing courtiers, demoting "traitors," and rewarding the loyal. A small circle of fervent followers act as his "royal guard," intimidating or assaulting those who cross him.

Though seemingly mad with his decrees, El Rey mixes with the trivial & the absurd potentially dangerous ordes all in keeping with his delusion and his goal of reclaiming kingship. One morning he may say "The peasants shall polish the floor tiles until they shine like marble," and another morning he will say in sly attempt to get guards used to breaches in asylum security, "All gates must be opened for tonight's coronation procession." Mazorra's Director Rodriguez Machado half expects him to say one day, "We march at dawn to retake the palace, make ready the banners!" since he also shows uncanny awareness of Cuban and world politics despite never reading a newspaper (due to overhearing a patient's secret crystal radio through a shared vent). While he publicly dismisses El Rey as harmless, he has privately orders guards to silence or sedate him first if a riot breaks out.

STR 55 **CON** 70 **SIZ** 70 **DEX** 60 **INT** 65
APP 75 **POW** 80 **EDU** 35 **SAN** 20 **HP** 14
DB/Build: +1d4 **Move:** 7 **MP:** 10 **Luck:** 30

Skills: Persuade 65%, Intimidate 50%, Sword (Improvised) 45%, Insight 60%, Psychology 75%, **Languages:** Spanish 80%, English 45%, French 40%, Bantu 30%
Combat: Sword 45% [1d4+DB] Fist 45%, Dodge 30%,
Insanity (Delusion) *He is the King of Spain*; followers gain +20% Intimidate while obeying his orders
Talents (Insane) Talents: Augmented Psychology: intuitively reads others fears/motivations with great accuracy

Back Story

- **Bio:** Gifted Havana dockworker, union orator & dabbler in Afro-Cuban spiritualism, his delusions grew after the Spanish monarchy fell in 1931; he is convinced he's Alfonso XIII (shared birthday) & destined to reclaim the throne.
- **Description**: Elaborate uniform with medals, papier mâché crown, sword with real golden plated hilt with semi-precious gemstones and a silver painted dowel for a blade (sharpened which he can use to stab with).
- **Traits:** Charismatic. Regal. Superstitious.
- **Motivation:** Restore his throne in Spain and punish any traitors blocking this goal.
- **RPG Hooks**: The staff at the Mazorra try to keep the General and the King apart precisely because together their complementary delusions could cause an unstoppable riot at the asylum.

Note: The last King of Spain was *Alphonso VIII* forced to leave Spain April 14, 1931 but never abdicated.

Senorita Dolores García 28yo, "*The Beautiful Murderess";* Insane Patient, Mazorra Asylum

A strikingly beautiful but notorious inmate who back in 1926 murdered her lover, the former Mayor of *Santiago de Vegas* after he spurned her pregnancy and then her child was stillborn. His stopping her medically effective *Lithia* water when he abandoned her played an ironic role in his death since she has *manic-depressive psychosis* (bipolar disorder) and she decompensated without this source of lithium. At her trial she was declared not legally responsible and sent to the Mazorra.

Here she has become the asylum's most infamous almost-escape artist, since fate always thwarts her escape plans at the last moment. Each time she attempts escape some bizarre twist of fate leads to her recapture. Some RNs and orderlies are convinced she is cursed since she is caught so often, and her MDs thinks she doesn't want to escape. Her latest escape plan as she is cycling up into hypomania is to disguise herself as one of the visitors which may accidentally implicate the investigators or serve as a convenient distraction.

STR 45 **CON** 75 **SIZ** 60 **DEX** 70 **INT** 75
APP 90 **POW** 60 **EDU** 95 **SAN** 10 **HP** 13
DB/Build: 0 **Move:** 8 **MP:** 12 **Luck:** 25
Combat:

- Brawl 30% (15/6), damage 1D3+1D4
- Razor Blade 25% (12/5), damage 1D4
- Dodge 35% (17/7)

Skills: Charm 97%, Persuade 80%, Art/Craft (Sewing) 65%, Stealth 55%, Natural World 20%
Languages: Spanish 80%, English 30%
Traits: Charismatic, Aggressive
Insanity (Delusion) *She is Cursed & Unlucky);*
Dolores is convinced she is doomed to fail every escape plan, which either collapses through coincidence or self-sabotage. *Keeper: Apply*

Disadvantage (roll twice, take worse) on any Stealth, or Persuade rolls tied to breakout attempts.

Back Story

- **Bio:** Born in Santiago de Vegas. Worked as seamstress for Mayor's wife.
- **Description:** Beautiful, black sleek hair, flashing eyes. Slender build.
- **Traits:** Alluring. Volatile. Cold-blooded.
- **Motivation:** Freedom at any cost.

Baltasar Urrutia *"El Martillo" ("The Hammer"):* 39yo M, Cuban; former heavyweight boxer, Mazorra patient with *dementia pugilistica (Boxer's dementia).*

"El Martillo" once thrilled Cuban crowds with bone-breaking punches 10 years ago. Now the 6'11" man is a living wreckage of former self from his many ring injuries, with slurred speech, chronic head tremor, shuffling gait, headaches, and often muddled thinking, but still possessing staggering strength. Baltazar has been seen bending iron bars, tearing straitjackets, and flooring men with a single punch. Regular laudanum given twice daily keeps him docile and his headaches at bay; if stopped there will be chaos. Those who can supply this or soothe his pains can influence him significantly. He moves silently through Mazorra unmolested by inmates and guards alike. Even "The Persian" avoids his obvious hyper-normal physical abilities.

STR 105 **CON** 90 **SIZ** 100 **DEX** 40 **INT** 45
APP 40 **POW** 50 **EDU** 35 **SAN** 20 **HP** 20
DB/Build: +2D6 / 3 **Move:** 7 **MP:** 10 **Luck:** 30

Combat:

- Brawl 85% (42/17), dmg 1D6+2D6 (sledgehammer fists)
- Grapple 75% (37/15), restrain/disarm/choke out
- Dodge 25% (12/5)

Armor: None
Skills: Intimidate 75%, Spot Hidden 40%, Listen 45%
Traits: Slow thinker
Insanity (Compulsion): *Noise + Stopped Meds:* He'll explode into insane violence if provoked by headache inducing loud noises, or he is denied laudanum q12 hours. *Keeper: POW roll to resist explosive violence; Brawl automatic advantage when attacking.*
Insanity (Phobia) *Bells*; the sound of *bells (church, boxing ring, alarm clock)* irrationally panics him, *Keeper: must roll POW or drop into a squat, covering head, unable to act for 1D6 rounds (–20% on all actions even on rolled success.*

Back story:

- **Bio:** Heavyweight boxer from Media Luna, Cuba (lower SW coast of island).
- **Description**: Huge, usually slow-moving man 6'11, 125 kg. Purple boxer shorts.
- **Traits**: Slow Speaker.
- **Motivation:** Always fight for the underdog.
- **RPG Hooks:** Keepers can utilize him a like a wandering monster. If he provoked, his non-lethal attack could drop an investigator or NPC instantly. Could be used as a time-bomb if he is near when alarm clock or firecracker is set off.

Senorita
Isabella Domínguez Varona
37-yo F, Mazorra patient; delusional artist who paints 'prophetic paintings'

Srta. Varona is a middle aged woman obsessed with current President Geraldo Machado, and believes that he is her secret fiancé; t shadowy unknown 'enemies' block their union & living happy ever after.

She paints breathtaking photorealistic oil paintings of staff & visitors, demanding only copious amounts of canvas, brushes, and absinthe in return. However, when she is upset, say at news her imaginary lover is in peril, her paintings develop more macabre elements of death or danger. She cannot truly see the future, yet when her paintings depict others in peril, those subjects often grow anxious and distracted, sometimes fulfilling the very fate portrayed. Others have twisted her "warning paintings" into weapons, engineering the depicted mishaps against their enemies so that blame might fall on supernatural forces, or on the patient herself.

Many of her paint pigments are toxic too: *Scheele's green* (arsenic), *Uranium Yellow*, *Caput Mortuum* (*ground mummies*). She also makes her own paints from fungi collected on the grounds in the abandoned buildings. She handles her paints with her bare, paint-streaked hands, which has contributed to her forgetfulness and fanciful psychedelic dream images she also paints. Too much time spent in her quarters, painting studio, or to one of her drying paintings will expose anyone else to their toxic and even hallucinogenic effects.

STR 45 **CON** 50 **SIZ** 50 **DEX** 60 **INT** 75
APP 85 **POW** 70 **EDU** 60 **SAN** 25 **HP** 15
DB/Build: 0 / 0 **Move:** 7 **MP:** 14 **Luck:** 35

Combat: Brawl 40% (1D3), Knife 50% (1D4+1), Dodge 35%
Skills: Art/Paint 75%, Spot Hidden 50%, Listen 50%, Psychology 50%, Persuade 60%
Languages: Spanish 70%, French 30%, English 10%
Insanity (Delusion) That President Machado is in love with her (erotomania). If she ever learns

Machado has fled country, POW roll; failure = violent outbursts, compulsive painting, inciting followers, possible escape attempt.

- **Pulp (Insane) Talents:** *Unforgettable Face*: bonus die for *Spot Hidden* vs. even disguised persons to recall them meeting them before.
- **Pulp Trappings (*Toxic Paints*):** Exposure < 1 hour = POW roll to resist. CON roll or suffer 1 HP + penalty die on INT rolls for 1d6 hours (headaches, dizziness); >1 hour CON roll or *gain penalty die on all skill rolls for 24h AND a temporary delusion* where viewer believes the painting/prophecy is all about them.

Backstory

- **Bio:** Unmarried and always a little odd, her delusional disorder fully manifested 1924. Was in an expensive private sanitorium unto her parents died and money ran out, forcing her move into the Mazorra in 1931.
- **Description:** Very tall, titian hair pleated into long braids, paint-streaked hands and smock
- **Traits:** Intense. Humorless.
- **Motivation**: Unite with her beloved.

Ernesto Collado Martínez: 25-yo M *Undercover Reporter* feigning insanity for a story

Slim, jittery young journalist posing as a hysteric terrified of women to infiltrate Mazorra for a *Carteles* exposé. Keeps his cover with nervous tics and shrinking from female nurses, while secretly recording staff corruption and rumors of experiments.

Two long weeks among the inmates leave him doubting his own sanity. Lately he has been dreaming he is seeing the living dead moving through the grounds by moonlight, cadaverous patients in Mazorra smocks, not rotting but dissolving. Translucent patches gleam faintly on their skin, like an anatomical mannequin come to life. Whether vision, delusion, or omen of his own fate, Ernesto no longer knows.

If he spots visitors, he'll draw them near, then beg for escape. Insisting he is a journalist with proof in a hidden notebook written in his personal shorthand. He'll trade names of corrupt staff, dangerous patients, etc.

STR 50 **CON** 60 **SIZ** 55 **DEX** 60 **INT** 70 **APP** 65 **POW** 65 **EDU** 70 **SAN** 50 **HP** 12
DB/Build: 0 / 0 **Move:** 8 **MP:** 14 **Luck:** 35
Combat

- **Fist/Punch:** 45%, 1D3 damage
- **Kick:** 25%, 1D6 damage
- **Knife:** 40%, 1D4+DB damage

Armor: None
Skills: Fast Talk 65 Stealth 50 , Persuade 50, Spot Hidden 55 Psychology 55 Disguise 40 Art/Craft (Journalism) 60
Languages: Spanish 90%, English 40%
Pulp Talent: *Psychic Power; Precognition* 5% (manifests only as vivid dreams after sleep deprivation)

Back story:

- **Bio:** Born in Manzanillo, studied at Havana University, Chess Club & A.B.C. membership.
- **Description:** Slim, sharp-eyed, and intense, with dark, restless eyes. Wears threadbare but neat clothing, bowtie always slightly askew.
- **TRAITS:** Curious. Methodical. Haunted.
- **Motivation** Fame and recognition through a sensational exposé, but fears losing himself to the asylum's madness.

Notes: Keeper to decide just when the horrible visions he has in his dream take place, if ever.

Hector "Santa" Menéndez 20-yo M, Madonna delusion Mazorra inpatient;

Mazorra patient with the psychosis he is the earthly vessel of the Madonna aka the Virgin Mary buttressed by the seeming ability to cause miracles. As a result, he commands devotion from >200 patients and a dozen superstitious staff and acts as their cult leader.

Hector is calm, and unnervingly persuasive due to his own self-belief, and the miraculous if transient responses to his prayers and benedictions that inspire awe and worship. Followers believe these are literal miracles, reinforcing his cult leader status; miracles that fade were because of latent sin in the previously cured. His fanatically devout worshippers provide him superior quarters, food, even money. Medical staff uneasily rationalize his abilities on other patients as "remarkable remission" or "psychological suggestion."

STR 35 **CON** 35 **SIZ** 40 **DEX** 50 **INT** 70 **APP** 90 **POW** 75 **EDU** 60 **SAN** 20 **HP** 8
DB/Build: –1 / 0 **Move:** 7 **MP:** 15 **Luck:** 40

Combat: Brawl 20% (10/4), dmg 1D3; Dodge 40% (20/8)
Armor: None
Skills: Persuade 75%, Charm 70%, Fast Talk 60%, Psychology 50%
Languages: Spanish 80%, English 30%
Insanity (Delusion): that he is the holy vessel of the Madonna, the mother of God
Pulp (Insanity) Talent: *Benediction*
Hector can trigger psychosomatic remission of medical symptoms of many disorders (disease or disability) that vanish for 1D6 days/weeks before returning. Underlying cause persists, so not a cure. Examples: cough in a TB patient, chronic pain in a patient with a neuropathy.

Pulp (Insanity) Talent: *Insane Talent Catalyst*
Once per scene, Hector may unlock a latent pulp insanity talent in another inmate/staff member via touch. Effect lasts 3D6 minutes, then fades, leaving exhaustion, pain, or relapse. Examples: tremor vanishes, violent patient calms, blind inmate navigates by intuition.

Back story:

- **Bio:** Born in Santiago de Cuba; started 'hearing voices' at the age of 17 he was the chosen vessel of Mary (*Dementia Praecox* now known as *schizophrenia*).
- **Description:** Young, frail, pale, and ethereally serene. Dressed in bleached white Mazorra smock & has a blue scarf worn about his head; the combination appears to many that appear to many as religious robes like the Virgin Mary.
- **Traits:** Serene.
- **Motivations**: Mazorra is his *Jerusalem*; he wants to expand his cult until he is worshiped openly. Disbelieves to be converted or cast out.

María Luisa Quintanilla: *La Enfermera de Sangre* (*The Blood Nurse).* 54yo F, former RN; Mazorra patient & homicidal caregiver.

As an inmate-orderly María exudes a soothing, almost hypnotic presence. Her dark eyes appraise the sick with chilling precision before softening into a reassuring smile. Yet in her care, patients have fallen asleep and never awakened.

Once a respected nurse, she turned killer in the community, granting what she called "release from suffering" with her signature blend of atropine and morphine. Now confined to the *Female Intercurrent Disease Pavilion*, she is permitted to act as a hospital orderly only under strict supervision. But if ever left alone, her lethal compassion resurfaces, making her as dangerous as any surgeon's scalpel.

STR 45 **CON** 50 **SIZ** 55 **DEX** 60 **INT** 75 **APP** 85 **POW** 70 **EDU** 80 **SAN** 25 **HP** 15
DB/Build: 0 / 0 **Move:** 8 **MP:** 14 **Luck:** 35
Combat: Brawl 35% (17/7), dmg 1D3; Dodge 40% (20/8)
Armor: None
Skills: Medicine 75%, Psychology 65%, Persuade 60%, Sleight-of-Hand 50%, Listen 50%
Languages: Spanish 90%, English 40%
Insanity (Delusion); She claims special powers to know exactly when patients will die, and all those she believes have less than 1 year to live deserve Mercy Euthanasia which only she can painlessly provide.
Pulp (insane) Talents: *Sedating Voice: Keeper: once daily anyone who fails POW roll while alone with her while she is talking soothingly to them falls asleep*
Back Story

- **Bio:** Mazorra trained RN turned serial killer; has provided mercy killings to at least 7 in-patients using atropine & morphine ever since began in 1918. Was declared insane 1930 because she frames her murders as an act of nursing, & she knows more than doctors exactly when persons will die which is delusion of grandeur.
- **Description:** Oddly youthful woman, unlined face, brown hair and eyes. Immaculately clean smock, hands, and hair.
- **Traits:** Jolly. Calculating. Ruthless.
- **Motivation:** Stop the dying from suffering at all costs, but don't get caught no matter what.

Stamatios Herras *"El Cyclops";* 19-yo or 32-yo M, Greek; Mazorra patient, survivor of the *USS Cyclops*

Herras appears to be a perfectly rational man employed in a repair shop at the Mazorra, and since he has two eyes his nickname of seems bizarre.

He was picked up at sea after being found clinging to a life-preserver in the West Atlantic by a freighter bound for Havana near Puerto Rico March 14th 1928. Herras told his rescuers he had been a machinist mate born in Chios Greece who signed up Jan 1918 in Norfolk Virginia, and was serving aboard the *USS Cyclops*, a Navy Oiler with a load of manganese ore from Brazil when the ship rolled in a storm.

However, The *USS Cyclops* had disappeared without a trace March 14th, 1918 *ten years earlier.* All 306 aboard her disappeared in the middle what has later been termed the Bermuda Triangle. This claim of a gap of 10 years is an impossibility, the man must be delusional or lying. But he recounts impossible details of the *USS Cyclops* last voyage, her unconventional captain, crew, and ship layout, cargo, were all accurate with additional plausible details no one else had known other than a few in the US State Department.

As for the sinking of the USS Cyclops his story is unchanging. *"It was March 7th, 1918, during the night. It was just 8 bells (4 am) when I heard a deep groaning inside her hull. Then came a lurch so sudden I was thrown sideways from my bunk. The Cyclops rolled hard to starboard and kept on rolling. Then all lights all went out, and in the blackness, freezing water poured in with a roar. I heard others about me, their shouts, prayers, all faded nothing but the terrible thundering sound of water pouring in could be heard and then I blacked out. The next thing I knew it was daytime, and I was floating in the sun holding onto some have submerged boxes of canned beef. I don't know why I lived when no one else did. Maybe I wasn't meant to survive at all. Sometimes I wonder if I'm the man who drowned water and someone else climbed out wearing my skin."*

Herras' apparent youthful age at the time and matter-of-fact story is unnervingly convincing. While Mazorra staff label him delusional, they all oddly avoid him for his unsettling confidence in his story. His conviction of his belief also is 100%, and *he will not change his story* despite others saying if he would simply recant his story, he would be able to return

home. And this is his terrifying ability when the investigators realize he is no merely delusional raconteur, but a living anomaly, a genuine impossibility in a world of scientific rationality. *His very existence is a cosmic horror that challenges everything else that is sane and rational.*
Languages: Greek 80%, Spanish 30%, English 50%
Pulp (insane) Talent: *Anomaly of Existence*: First encounter when persons meet him and are convinced by their own efforts [eg. the *Pulp Talent Intuitive* or a *Hard Success* on a *Psychology* roll, or use of *Spells* like *Call/Contact* or *Mindreading*] forces SAN loss (0/1D4). Future encounters with Herras will cause lingering unease (penalty die on SAN checks vs Fear/Dread while he is present).

Back story

- **Bio:** Born in Chios Greece; Signed up to join the US Navy age 18. After basic Naval training first berth was aboard *USS Cyclops.*
- **Description:** Wiry appears 25 but prematurely white-haired; crisp looking naval *USS Cyclops* anchor tattoo on his R upper forearm
- **Traits:** Stubborn, Unimaginative

Notes: Not insane but he challenges the sanity of others. This seemingly time-slipped survivor hints at other cosmic anomalies of *Fortean* proportions.

Jeremías "The Persian" Yohama, *"The Executioner"*

50-yo M, *Congolese Leopard-Man Shaman, Mazorra patient and homicidal enforcer.*

Yohama is a menacing inmate of Mazorra, used by *Captain Gandia* and the more sadistic Mazorra guards to as both enforcer and executioner. His past is unknown to the hospital authorities, but they are happy to use a patient who has no conscience to provide them plausible deniability. He tortures fellow patients with cold-blooded ease, and on orders has killed others outright wielding a blood-crusted crowbar borrowed from Captain Gandia himself. Most patients, and even guards and orderlies dare not face him alone.

Not only violent, 'The Persian', whose name is a corruption of his district in East Africa is more than insane, he is *unsane*, convinced he can transform into a leopard through ritual and *borfima*, a magic elixir brewed from human entrails and psychedelic herbs. Within Mazorra he continues his rites and is secretly leading a hidden Leopard Men cult. At each dark moon, he selects victims for sacrifice, killing with a twin-pronged fork while clad in ceremonial leopard skin. Disappearances of patients are dismissed as wanderings and covered up by frantic Mazorra staff.

STR 85 CON 80 SIZ 90 DEX 55 INT 60
APP 40 POW 60 EDU 50 SAN 25 HP 18
DB/Build: +1D6 / 2 **Move:** 8 **MP:** 12 **Luck:** 30

Combat:

- **Brawl 75%** (37/15), dmg 1D6+1D6 (fists)
- **Bite 50%** (25/10), dmg 1D4+1D4 (sharp filed teeth)
- **Grapple 60%** (30/12), can restrain or choke
- **Dodge 30%** (15/6)
- **Claw Fork** (Fighting Brawl 40%), dmg 1D6+DB, impale, 1-handed; wounds resemble leopard mauling, +1D4 bleed on impale

Skills: Intimidate 80%, Spot Hidden 40%, Listen 50%, Stealth 70%
Languages: Spanish 60%, French 30%, Lingala 50%
Insanity (Delusion): That he is truly a Leopard Man who can transform his mind into an animal and as a result he is immune from violent death. Brawl +20%, ignores Major Wound penalties for 1D6 rounds.
Insanity (Compulsion): must kill on the darkest night of the lunar month for his blood ritual.
Backstory:

- **Bio:** Once the *Bati Yeli*, or executioner, of his district's *Leopard Men Secret Society* in Africa, cannibal bandits dressed in animal skins and spreading the rumour they could transform into wild animals. After he slew three colonial policemen in a single night he stowed away to Havana. After murdering a sailor, he was discovered by horrified harbour police eating the heart and liver of his victim raw. Bribery by his cult spared him trial for murder, consigning him instead to Mazorra for reasons of insanity.
- **Description:** Very muscular Black man with teeth sharpened to points, the Persian he moves silently with stalking grace. During his ritual murders wears a leopard skin cloak & mask
- **Traits:** Cunning, Sadistic. Superstitious.
- **Motivation:** To fully transform his mind into a leopard by increasing his consumption of human blood and flesh; to eventually take over the Mazorra.

I have run out of space due to the 16-page cap for E&A. Here are some others I've written up perhaps for next time if there is interest:

Tomás 'Tambor' Aguirre: (*The Drummer).* 56-yo M; communicates only by tapping Morse code on tables, walls and pipes.

Claudio Rivera y Zayas: *The Fake Mute.* 40 yo a planted member of the *Porra*, tasked with guarding a hidden vault constructed during the 1927 Mazorra restoration with his twin brother Sebastian.

Mateo Quintana: 66 yo M *Santerian Brujah.* Imprisoned for his religious beliefs and practices, not insanity. Starved and mistreated. Holds a centuries old *Twsha elixir* from a *Profundo* Shaman.

More nextish, along with more details on **Machado's Mazzora Vault,** and ***Horrors from the Mazorra.***

COMMENTS: E&A #2

ATTRONARCH: RAE your puzzle-trap ideas and filed away some ideas for future use.

BRIAN ROGERS: Happy belated birthday! So pleased to learn you are getting to play with both adults and kids in different campaign spaces. <> *RYCTM:* Yes, having kids is a great way to notice that time keeps on speeding up the older we get.

JIM VASSILAKOS: RAE. <> *RYCTM:* I had never heard of the 1968 Wilson plot against the then UK PM, and I had to read about UK media mogul Cecil King; after thinking about it, I think King rather overvalued his importance and influence under the false premise his *Daily Mirror* directly led to the downfall of Churchill.

MYLES CORCORAN: Ah, so we meet again in APA print again! Re dry and now wet weather in our respective countries; I think it has rained exactly once in here two months, and this on the occasion I left my car's sunroof open a crack. Bah! <> *Re Mausritter:* RAE your write-up. Had there been thoughts of diverting the hawk to attack the besieging rats? Snerk at "I'm not that kind of frog!" Thanks for including the links. This looks like a sweet game, and it seems you get a digital copy for 'name your own price' from their web-page. <> *Role-gaming in Cuba in the 1930s bug*: I've been bitte! My brief visit to Havana left an impression because, in many ways, the city hasn't changed much since the 1930s, making it feel closer to that era. Back then, Havana was a true *Pearl of the Antilles* for the wealthy: a sugar wealth capital with radio stations, newspapers, magazines, electric streetcars, and ambitious projects like *El Capitolio* and the *Malecón.* It's heartbreaking to see on my visit so much neglect and decay of what once was. <>Re any *CoC* scenarios set in Havana, see my comment to Lisa Padol.

Contemporary anti-fascist mass media feels scarce, aside from the new *South Park* episodes, and some of the more outspoken comedy talk shows, even as democracy falters: National Guard in the US Capitol, Border Police menacing Gov. Newsom's redistricting talks in California, and a Russia's dictator given a red-carpet welcome in Anchorage Alaska.

LISA PADOL: Thanks! I wasn't aware of any Havana CoC scenarios until YCTM about Jeff Moeller's "Servant of God" in "Tales of the Caribbean" (2015). <> I hope you and Joshua had fun at WorldCon!

JOHN REDDEN RAE your 'Resconstructing Planets' write-up for your *Winter Mini-Con.* Re *ICE invading your property;* Fuckers or rather a modern era *Porra.* My sympathies for this and for your callus woes on your Norwegian cruise. Kudos for your SF book with the curvy silhouette enjoying a starry tesseract.

GABRIAEL ROARK: I'm glad to learn your Mom is on the mend. <> *Roster of A&E Issues*: This is a is very interesting to read, since I had to regretfully tell someone who contacted me via RPGGeek interested in researching John Sapienza's contributions to A&D that despite having many paper copies of A&E going back to #50, I have only the PDF copies Lee Gold sent me with my hardcopy issues.

PATRICK RILEY: *Re How Much for a Finger and chasing down chaos monkeys:* your part as cat herder in this rolegame aptly describe what part I don't miss any more in my former hospital leadership position.

GEORGE PHILLIES: RYCTM: Thanks! *Re Operator #5 heroines being threatened with being fired out of a gun*: that was May-June 1939 *'Winged Hordes of the Yellow Vulture'.* This was a middle entry in the 9 issue *Yellow Invasion* sequence written by Wayne Rogers. A thinly disguised Japan, after first invading Canada heads south to invade the US. The magazine was abruptly cancelled after the final Dec 1939 issue in which Canada and Washington DC are both destroyed, leaving all those still alive in America in despair and the readers wondering.

MICHAEL CULE: I started reading your *Uncle* comments mid paragraph, and for a few seconds I thought you were referring to the lead of that quirky series of ***Uncle*** books by J. P. Martin. And after reading your description I'll stand by that initial instant erroneous assumption! From the first lines of that first book, **"Uncle is an elephant. He's immensely rich, and he's a BA. He dresses well, generally in a purple dressing-gown, and often rides about on a traction engine, which he prefers to a car."**

PEDRO PANCOCA Da SILVA & MAIRA ZUCOLOTTO: Good to see you two back! I enjoyed your overview of *Ecos da fantasia;* what a variety of solo adventures. So when are YOU going to write a similar style gamebook, perhaps set again the backdrop of Manaus? <> For stories set further up the Amazon may I suggest both for reference or fun one of Robert E. Howard's favourite adventure writers American pulp magazine *Adventure*, Arthur O. Friel? He wrote the *Pedro and Lourenço* short

stories (1919 to 1929), and longer novels featuring a trio of three former WWI buddies, McKay, Ryan, & Knowlton beginning with *The Pathless Trail* (1922) & *Tiger River* (1923). These are all simply terrific and are available to read for free from the *Internet Archive*.

JIM ECKMAN: As a long-time Andre Norton fan, I'm excited to see what you find to do this. My favourite books by her include 'The Zero Stone', 'The Beast Master' & 'The Sargasso of Space." Someone has used Mongoose Traveller for this. <> You reminded me that I had once met Dave Pulver ~1986 at Queen's University in Canada when he was a senior in my then-GF's 2nd semester history class. She introduced me when she learned we were both gamers. This was long before he became a well-known Canadian free-lance RPG designer, but I remember asking him the one time we met if GURPS blasters were named after Norton's use of the term; he visibly shuddered and said, "I hope not!

HEATH ROW: Thanks for your glowing comments! I'm glad some else is enjoying this current history ~~obsession~~ interest of mine. <> I'll add that while I'm no longer HOS, I'm still at HHS as an academic Geriatrician & teach, see patients, & more, only without umpteen too early meetings every month.

JOSHUA KRONENGOLD: *RYCTM:* I see in that first A&E I contributed only a few other persons contributing still until the end; Lisa Padol, Doc Cross, Patrick Riley, Spike Jones, and Lee Gold herself.

PATRICK ZOCH: Kudos for naming E&A.<>Very nice *DysonLogos* styled maps! <>*RYCTM on Fighting Fascism in the pulps:* Before Adolf Hitler declared war on the USA Dec. 11th 1941 after Pearl Harbor, few American pulp heroes openly battled fascism, the exceptions being the ones I wrote about before and even in *Operator #5* they avoided direct mention of Nazi Germany, only calling them by colour-coded euphemisms, so instead of Hitler & Nazi Germany, we get Rudolph I, "Purple Emperor, War-Master of Europe and Asia".

Only after the US entry 27 months later did pulp heroes start going openly after Nazis. The 'Suicide Squad' novellas that appeared in *Ace-G-Men* (*May/June 1936 - April 1943*) had many stories where this trio of FBI agents routinely fought Nazis and Japanese Imperialists. *Doc Savage* does fight openly Nazis and their ilk (e.g. *The Black Black Witch March 1943, Hell Below Sept 1943, The Shape of Terror July 1944*), as does the *Shadow* (e.g. *Vengeance Bay March 1942, Death Had Grey Eyes April 1945)* the latter operating of vigilante counter-spy cell. And there were many depictions of the ongoing war as these pulp covers depict. <> As for your other comment on what appeared in the pulps from those on the other side of the war, follow Pulp historian Jess Nevins link: **Pulp Science Fiction Under German Totalitarianism**

Comic book writers and artists however fought Nazis in the mass media by name long before anyone else really did. The Golden Age of comic book heroes began when *Superman* appeared in *Action Comics #1* in June 1938. By issue #17 (*Oct 1939*) had Superman confronting soldiers from a vaguely named European power dressed in Nazi-styled helmets. In issue #43 (*released Dec 1940 despite 1941 cover date*) the cover explicitly shows Superman confronting a Nazi paratrooper. The most famous blow however came in *Captain America* #1 (Dec 1940), with its cover of Cap punching Adolph Hitler in the jaw. This defiant anti-Nazi statement that drew extensive hate mail and death threats from the *German American Bund* and 'America Firsters' while all the same still selling almost 1 million copies.

Art Spiegelman[1] has pointed out that the architects of early superhero comics, figures like Siegel and Shuster, Joe Simon and Jack Kirby, Stan Lee, and others, were largely Jewish immigrants or their children, working on society's margins when the wrote for these 'kiddie books'. At the same time all were deeply aware of the rise of virulent antisemitism and fascism in 1930s Europe. In their comic books they crafted heroes to confront antisemitism and dictatorship even before America joined the war.

These early comic book heroes were not mere escapist fantasies, Art Spiegelman argues, they were born from lived histories of oppression and channeled urgent moral outrage into the popular culture of the time and added in his essay at a dig to Trump *"In today's all too real world, Captain America's most nefarious villain, the Red Skull, is alive on screen and an Orange Skull haunts America."*

ME: My apologies for going over the 16-page limit for E&A; I'll be within limits this time.

Everyone Else: RAEBNC

Aug 21st 2025. BCM

[1] American cartoonist best known for his graphic novel *Maus*.

Ronin Engineer for Ever and Anon #3
by Jim Eckman,
Mountain View, CA
alarum@roninengineer.com

Ignorable Theme

I'm not sure I have a playing style. I do prefer running intelligent types versus Thrud the Barbarian, but I will give anything a try given a decent GM and players.

Reactions to Issue #2

This month has been a bit crazy, I haven't had as much time as I wished. There's much more content compared to the old stencil days. I'm glad those are gone!

John Redden - ICE Invasion scary! Reconstructing Planets looks like fun. Is this a COC variant? Horror on the Orient Express! Good writeup, back in the 80s I rode this train with with the 1930s cars.

Brian Rogers Swords of the Serpentine sounds interesting. Support our libraries!

Patrick Riley – Yakuza Battletech!

Gabriel Roark – RAEBNC

Myles Corcoran - RAEBNC

Attronarch - RAEBNC

Pedro Panhoca da Silva and Maira Zucolotto - RAEBNC

Mark Nemeth – Good review of Daggerheart, I'm so out of date!

Dylan Capel - RAEBNC

Michael Cule - RAEBNC

PUM - RAEBNC

Patrick Zoch - RAEBNC

Heath Row - RAEBNC

Mark A. Wilson - RAEBNC

Joshua Kronengold - RAEBNC

Lisa Padol – I'll put something stat.

Brian Christopher - Misiaszek Havana Horror is amazing.

Plankwell Campaign – RAEBNC

Figure 1: Old Artifacts by Jim Eckman

An Unlooked For Zine #2

Copyright Lisa Padol 2025
Lisa Padol, 39-20 52nd Street, Apt. GD, Woodside, NY 11377, 718-937-8919. I am currently seeking employment.
email: drcpunk@labcats.org or drcpunk@gmail.com

SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT

As many folks know, I'm gathering zines for a single one-shot electronic-only apa called Something Completely Different, as a thank you to Lee Gold, sort of a festschrift (which, if I remember correctly, is a collection of essays collected into a book in honor of a professor) and a celebration of the community she created.

Somehow, someone got the idea that the deadline for this was 21 July. This is not the case.

THE DEADLINE FOR SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT IS **31 AUGUST 2025**.

If you haven't submitted something and want to, you do still have time. If you have questions about Something Completely Different, ping me and I'll see if I can answer them.

Heck, given I haven't yet written my zine, if you want to get something in and think you'll be running a bit late, ping me.

NATTER

The ENnies have happened, and at least one gamer decided to do their own awards: https://gestaltistrpg.substack.com/p/the-gesties?r=lexvk&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web&triedRedirect=true#footnote-anchor-2-170065009

The ENnie winners and nominees are listed here: https://ennie-awards.com/2025-winners/

In other news, I've now seen the movie Wicked, which is the first part of the musical on which it's based. I enjoyed it and didn't find it overly long. I also deliberately looked it up on Wikipedia first. I don't know if I'll enjoy the second part as well.

Josh and I are back from Worldcon in Seattle. We hadn't expected to be going to Time Bubble, a very small larping convention in September, but our friend Gaylord Tang decided he did want to go after all -- and he noted that our "favorite AirBnB" is available. This is the place whose owners collect pinball machines and let folks staying there play them for free. So, we are now planning to go, larp, maybe work on writing or polishing a larp, and play pinball.

COMMENTS, BELATED AND TRANSLATED, ON ALARUMS AND EXCURSIONS #593: The Last Issue of A&E

LEE GOLD: Thank you for all the years of Alarums and Excursions, and for friendship and conversation both inside and outside the apa. re igtheme: *giggle* at the image of the PCs in the Japanese campaign waiting politely to see if the police needed their help. re the Latin "sic" as the likely source for the Spanish "si": That hadn't occurred to me, but it sounds quite plausible.

re Spike re Hamlet running his unsheathed dagger up and down his arms: I'd also find that chilling, not introverted. re managing a brothel: I knew someone who had done that. She said that one of the first things she asked new "girls" to do was to undress, and if they hesitated, she would point out that if they couldn't undress for her, they'd have trouble doing that for customers.

re me: Thanks for the full La Guardia quote about the Devil. re not liking game systems that allow panicking people to run faster than a horse can gallop: That makes sense. When something like that happens in a game I'm running, which I think is rare, there's usually magic or other supernatural stuff involved. Fr'ex, when I ran Dracula Dossier for Night's Black Agents, the PCs saw someone running after them and gaining on them. Their pursuer was on foot. They were in a car. This was intended, among other things, as a giant Clue that the pursuer was inhuman.

I'm not sure if I did anything else like that. I know that when there are Lovecraftian monstrosities, these can generally outrun any human and might well overtake a horse, car, or plane. I know that if I'm playing in a superhero game, someone might have a superpower that allows the same thing. But in all of these cases, we're clearly not in a game that's worried about realism, at least, not in that respect.

re Spike re Ethiopia and Italy: This comes up in the Trail of Cthulhu campaign Eternal Lies. Indeed, it's one of the things in the campaign that points to it originally being set in 1934, rather than in 1937, which is what the chronology seems to indicate. Justin Alexander noted this when he wrote about the campaign (https://thealexandrian.net/wordpress/37078/roleplaying-games/eternal-lies-the-alexandrian-remix) and iirc, speculated that one reason the year was changed to 1937 was because the authors wanted the PCs to have

access to a DC-3 plane, which, unlike the DC-2, could make transatlantic flights. The DC-3 wasn't available until the end of 1935. (Justin decided to set the game in 1934 and have the PCs' patron have access to a modified DC-2 that had some of the features of the DC-3. As their patron was very wealthy and could logically know one of the owners of the company that made the DC-2 and the DC-3, this was a good compromise.)

re Mark Nemeth re police in historical settings: While Melissa C. Scott's Astreiant books are fantasy, not historical, it's interesting to see how the Points (the setting's equivalent of the police) work. They're a relatively new development in the city the books are set in, and one of the protagonists is an anomaly because he doesn't take fees. That is, the Points get a salary, but not a very large one, and most of them collect fees for the work they do from the citizens who want their help. This is not illegal, nor is it considered strange. Later in the series, his lover joins a different group, one that is a potential rival to the Points -- but also a potential ally. This is also a world with two suns, and one in which astrology works. Our Pointsman protagonist might well say, "We have a drowned woman here. I need her horoscope to see if her stars suggested a death by drowning."

re Gabriel Roark re the Vikings game: I very much enjoyed the court cases that some of the PCs ruled on. re "decimate": I think I learned that in Latin class in my senior year of high school. I remember it coming up in a novel by Rosemary Sutcliff, where a couple of the characters learn that a legion rebelled and/or scattered when threatened with decapitation as a punishment, and one of the characters thinks to himself that, yes, it's "only" a one in ten chance that any given person in the legion would be killed, but also that none of legionnaires want to take that chance.

JOSHUA KRONENGOLD: re Natter: While the convention assigned us the room we used for Breakthru, yes, I think part of it was still on us. We knew which room months in advance, and we could have said we needed more space. We just didn't know we did. But we did explicitly say something along the lines of "We only need one room." OTOH, ours wasn't the only game in a space smaller than would have been ideal. As I noted, Modern Gods could very much have used more space.

re Lee re large groups splitting up into smaller groups for combat, like battle manga / anime does it: This does not necessarily shorten the combat! Recall how very, very long a certain battle went on in Bleach. It was an amazing battle, and we were absolutely invested, but oh my, it went on for many, many episodes.

re Jerry Stratton: I disagree that we don't use a grid. I use it to figure out how many squares I can go and whether a spell I'm casting can hit someone. This is all about the grid. re playing monks: You helped me create Giovanni the Geometric as a plasmoid monk before the 2024 rules existed.

re igtheme on when/whether/how the PCs go to the cops: It does depend, of course. Fr'ex, in Call of Cthulhu, if it's near the end of a scenario, going to the cops may make sense and not de-protagonize the PCs. Fr'ex, one of the scenarios I helped playtest involves federal agents approaching the PCs, who've been in Innsmouth, because the Feds want to invite them along on the raid from "Shadow Over Innsmouth" and, even if the PCs decline (which ours did), to ask them to at least tell what they can about Innsmouth (which ours did). At least one of the Roman scenarios I've edited allows for the PCs to involve mundane authorities in punishing a sorcerer. It also has a reason for the PCs to have to deal with the sorcerer even if they've successfully gotten him convicted and sentenced to death.

re Patrick Riley re it being easier on the small scale most games work on to tell someone playing an NPC what to do than to train an AI: Yes, and you get some interesting play that I don't think AIs are currently capable of. I'm thinking of the run of Modern Gods at Intercon W, where Sarah Judd played Thor's deceased wife when he went to the underworld. Misunderstanding the lead GM / the author's instructions, the interaction went somewhere very different, but also amazingly good, and this is something one can't plan. There's almost certainly an element of reading the room / reading the players, and that's not yet something an AI can do. (E.g., a human GM would (okay, to be strictly accurate, *should*) understand that Jim Vassilakos didn't want his character to be sent away from the farm on big adventures and would stop trying to follow whatever internal script the AI had that attempted to make the character go out and have adventures -- or would say to Jim, "Hey, the whole premise is that your character travels and has adventures." The first is better, but the second is still better than what the AI was doing.)

On the other tentacle, I suppose it's possible an AI could have done a better job with the curve ball that run of Modern Gods had. That was when one of the players, for reasons that remain opaque, although I'm guessing he thought the heroes wanted more chance to be awesome, summoned the Devil about 15 minutes before the end of the game. Again, Sarah got this role, and the author/lead GM said that this character was pure evil.

At this point, Sarah -- like most of us players -- was a bit drained. The room was hot and crowded; we'd all

been playing for at least 4 hours (this being a 5 hour slot) and had hit several emotional climaxes. And inspiration flagged so that what Sarah wound up doing was saying, "I'm Satan, and I'm doing evil torture-y things! Evil torture-y things!" Additionally, Sarah was also, iirc, concerned that there were various endgame things they were supposed to be helping with.

It is possible that an AI could have helped out here. Sure, it was a larp, but I could see setting up a laptop and speaker to do a reasonably loud "I am the Lord of EVIL!" spiel.

However, for that to be viable, the author/lead GM would have had to program it. On the one hand, given they had a clear idea of what the Devil was, that could have worked well enough. On the other, they would have had to know that this might be needed. Summoning the Devil came completely out of the blue. It was one of those things that a player decided on the spur of the moment, something that one can't predict.

If it were something the author/lead GM had thought had a real chance of happening (or, indeed, any chance), however, we're back in "it's easier to tell whoever's playing the NPC how to do it" territory. Sure, "he's pure evil" might be where they started, but Sarah would have been able to ask for clarification in a quieter, calmer, before-the-game setting. All of that said, I do wonder now whether it would make sense, in theory, to try to program an AI to play the Holographic Laser Bishop in Does This Space Train Make My Sins Look Mortal?

And we know you can write a program to run choose-your-own modules or adventures for a larp or other form of rpg. Of course, one doesn't need AI for that.

re older vs newer Discworld: It's not necessarily about being fair, except perhaps inasmuch as we were doing an art comparison only. We had all the art available for the new game.

For me, it's more about not getting any younger, having a lot of games I've not yet read, and thus, needing, to a degree, to be sold on a game before I decide to buy it. And for Discworld in particular, I have enjoyed one out of the three Discworld books I read, and it is simply no use telling me that the other two were the Wrong Books when I had been told that those two were *specifically* Books Lisa Will Like.

I was intrigued by what I'd heard about the mechanics, but when I looked through the book, I had the "there's no place for someone like me here" feeling. I'm not sure that would have been an issue 30 years ago. Perhaps it would have. I'm not sure.

Certainly, the number of options for rgps to play in 1995 was smaller. This was, according to Wikipedia, two years before Legend of the Five Rings came out. When I reviewed it and other books in the L5R line, again and again I noted that it didn't have "bimbo art", that it had women who were dressed appropriately and not sexualized, or at least, no more so, IMO, than the men were, and that all of the preceding should go without saying for rpgs in general, but didn't.

So the quickstart art wasn't necessarily something that would have bugged me much in 1995. But today? I have so many options. I've spent the last few years playing Good Society and its various hacks. In the 1990s, I was either the only woman in games in our home group, or one of two. Over the years, the ratio has changed, both at home and at conventions. Heck, outside of Good Society, take another look at Swords of the Serpentine. Eversink isn't quite Astreiant, but it does some similar things gender-wise.

I bring up Swords of the Serpentine because, let's face it, I don't expect a Discworld game to be much like a Good Society game. These days, I'm probably measuring urban fantasy -- in the sense of a setting like Lankhmar, rather than Rivers of London -- rpgs against SotS.

And the quickstart for Discworld just didn't grab me. Maybe the full game will. Maybe not. Either way, it's okay; the game doesn't need my help to do well.

It's also worth noting that what the quickstart did was turn me off of backing the *kickstarter*. In 1995, that wasn't a thing. Either the company would have sold the quickstart or given it away; I would not have been giving the money for a full game before it existed. Then, as, really, now, the question would be: Will I buy the full game when it is available? And I don't know the answer yet.

re me: Interesting point that a billionaire's assets might not add up to 100%. re RSVP's horse marriages: Oh yes, I'd forgotten that there was a romance mechanic in the game. Not too surprising, as I didn't play in it. re disguise via literal piggybacking: That works to disguise oneself as someone taller, sure, but what about someone shorter? re High House trilogy: I should also read the third book. Unsure if I should re-read the first two first.

re Urban Shadows 2e: Yes, I wrote "Power" when I meant "Wild". Good catch. I like the idea of each of the four circles being active at different times, but I'm not sure I agree with the times you picked, particularly for Power.

Maybe Mortalis is your basic 9-5, give or take. Night would be prime clubbing and night-time crime hours,

the stereotypical ones. Call it from an hour or three after sundown to whenever it is bars and nightclubs tend to close? And Power is perhaps later than that, the private meetings where the "real" business gets done? You could say that this is also during the day, e.g., when folks meet on the golf course, but that might also be Mortalis. And while I do like the idea of Wild at the liminal times of dusk and dawn, I think Wild would also be active at noon and midnight -- and perhaps at random other times, suiting the name. Maybe there's an eclipse today or an odd conjunction of the planets, and Wild is acting to further its plans.

I definitely agree about the issue of using "Circle" for three different things. Shades of the Order of the Stick comic about using "level" in D&D (per https://www.giantitp.com/comics/oots0012.html).

re rules lawyering: Of course, what we're discussing, and what I think Doc Cross was also discussing, was doing this in reasonably good faith, or at least, with sincerity. I mention this as I recently had a conversation where I learned that one GM who is also an author of over a hundred Call of Cthulhu scenarios now specifies "a successful roll" because of someone arguing in what seems to me obvious bad faith.

Specifically, I gather this gamer said, "The scenario says I have to make a SAN roll to avoid losing SAN. It doesn't say I have to *succeed* on the roll!"

* First, no. Just no. Don't pull that crap.
* Second, I'm a bit curious as to how the player knew *precisely* what the scenario said.
* Third, if this is my home game, and the gamer persists after I give them A Look and/or otherwise tell them that's not how it works, that's a good way to ensure I will never invite them back.
* Fourth, if it's a convention game, and the gamer persists et cetera as above, after the game, I need to find someone on convention staff to tell them about this. This is partly because I do not think I can run a game with that player in it, and partly because if they're doing this in my game, they're likely doing it in other games as well. (If I'm told that it's my problem, not the convention's, this means I will probably never offer to run for that convention again. I'm clearly not the kind of GM they want running games.)

re Ascellan Conspiracy: Yep, that was probably a typo for the correct number. re Michael Cule re keeping track of who's gone in a game where everyone gets to go once per round, but there's no initiative per se: Tokens work, yes. I've also seen cards that get flipped when one goes.

re Gumshoe re the key thing being to embrace "spend points to guarantee (as best as possible) success": I hadn't thought of it like that, but you're right. It's how I played Trail of Cthulhu when Aviatrix ran it for me. I'd spend big and trust her to give Refreshes at appropriate intervals. She has a very good sense of when it's time.

CLARK TIMMONS: Out of curiosity, what novel were you reading that sparked the essay about trick bags? I think the closest I've seen to that sort of thing that first comes to my mind would be some of the folk magic spells in Call of Cthulhu.

ATTRONARCH: re Assassins' Guild: So they allow their clients' targets not to buy them off per se, but to but some extra time? Is this a renewable offer?

PEDRO PANHOCA DA SILVA AND MAIRA ZUCOLOTTO: *O porao* sounds harrowing. I gather from what you said that you were indeed interviewed for the article? (I can't enlarge the photo of it enough to look for names -- it gets blurry first.) re me: Thanks for the clarification!

TIMOTHY COLLINSON: re reMarkable 2: I've now backed and received Harbor Innovations's Paper 7. It's e-ink and color, and doesn't have a backlight, of course, and I haven't retired the other tablets I use. But it has a very nice feel. re Joshua Kronengold re Catherynne Valente: Yes, we have met her. I don't think she knows our names, but she might well recognize us as people who've come to many of her readings and other events.

DYLAN CAPEL: re The Situation: I cannot disagree. re Micky 17: I don't know if you've seen it, but Primer is definitely a movie where no one felt the need to explain or clarify for the audience's benefit. re me: Thanks for the info about Chainsaw Man.

ME: re John Redden re all the empires in sf: IIRC, Max Gladstone doesn't have emperors in most of his books? re Timothy Collinson re indexing streets at Hagstrom: An additional factor is that the same masterfile (or whatever it is those are called) for a map was used to generate:

* A regular sized atlas
* A pocket-sized atlas
* A folding street map
* Possibly other variants

And each of these generally required somewhat different indexing of many of the streets. Fr'ex, a page border in one atlas might result in needed to move the text to a different grid than it's in in another atlas or to index it on different pages in the two atlases.

I also remember my boss explaining to me that some company or other had boasted that its indexing software was 95% accurate, and that while this

sounded really impressive, one had to consider what that number meant. Suppose a town has 50,000 streets. 95% accuracy means that 2,500 of those streets might be indexed incorrectly. That sounds a lot less impressive.

re Craig Kamber re the hunting session in my Fearful Symmetries game: Actually, it turns out I didn't create many NPCs for that, and it was fine.

PAUL HOLMAN: While I gather that the GURPS Monster Hunters campaign is over, I am intrigued by the whole purple fungus business. Did that ever get resolved?

BRIAN MISIASZEK: Belated sympathy to Lauren re group projects! I'm glad the project went well. RAE El Angel Oscuro. How are you calculating the brothers' MOV? I know that, strictly by the numbers, the stats indicate Father Ignacio should have MOV 8, unless you're using the rules about aging, in which case, MOV drops as he gets older, but that should also apply to his older brother, which doesn't seem to be the case. OTOH, I think Chaosium kind of quietly dropped that aging rule (which is fine by me, if so), or at any rate, it doesn't seem to be present in the pulp rules or Down Darker Trails, iirc. On the third tentacle, given what he's been through, that alone could explain MOV 7.

re parrying with the bamboo pole: I do like the way the rules for parrying/dodging changed for 7th edition Call of Cthulhu. re the search for their father's remains: Is it possible for them to succeed? If so, how would they go about doing that?

CRAIG KAMBER: Has the move been completely now? re igtheme: Yes, if PCs treat NPCs cavalierly, this is not unlikely to bite them. And yes, that doesn't stop some groups from doing it, as they think the NPCs are there solely for the players' and PCs' benefit. And on the meta-level, I suppose that is true, but as you say, they don't think of themselves that way, and in world, the PCs shouldn't treat them like that. Amusingly, in my original Cthulhupunk campaign, one of the NPCs had a different version of that problem. As one of the players noted, the NPC thought that he was a PC/the hero/the main character, and this was a problem for him because he wasn't. It wasn't a problem for me, as I agreed that this was accurate.

HEATH ROW: re igtheme: Whether I sympathize with someone wanting an NPC to react a certain way, and whether that matters, depend on the situation.

* I once confused one of my players in a game of Sorcerer because I'd forgotten how I'd played an NPC in the previous session and I played her quite differently than they expected. My sympathy is with the player. They wanted and needed consistency, and I screwed up.

* If I'm running Urban Shadows, players need their PCs to encounter members of all four Circles (Mortalis, Night, Power, and Wild) because that is how PCs get xp and advance. This is a joint responsibility between players and GM, and saying "Roleplay better" often doesn't make sense.

* An inexperienced roleplayer has created a character who, on paper, is very persuasive and charismatic. The player is not and is a bit at a loss for how to play these qualities. Years ago, one of AEG's supplements for Legend of the Five Rings considered this problem, particularly when paired with a player who didn't make a character who was persuasive and charismatic, but is himself both.
** First, there was an example of how not to do it. The GM based everything on how the players went about having their characters try to court a noblewoman. The player whose PC had the skills wasn't in any way boorish or rude; it's just that the player wasn't himself skilled, and new to the game, didn't know what the etiquette of the setting was. The other player completely outmaneuvered him because that player knew how to do this. This, understandably, made the first player feel sad and like his character couldn't really do anything.
** Next, there was an example of how to help that player. The GM slows down a bit, walks the player through the scene and explains what would be expected that the character would know, and suggests rolling at the appropriate places. The GM does not let the other player take over. Things go much better for the player with the charismatic character.

The player needs NPCs to react to what the PC is, and one way is to walk the player through system and setting. Another way, and I recommend pairing this with the first, is to show NPCs reacting in small ways to the PC's charisma. So, yes, the player needs this, and in this particular case, my sympathies are with the player. Ideally, both the GM and the other player will help get this player more used to the mechanics and the setting. But it's important to remember that we don't all have the same skill at roleplaying in every type of situation, and that this is different from feeling entitled to walk all over the NPCs.

* The flower example is interesting because I played in a playtest of Joust With Spirit where one of the players wanted zeir character to be able to do flower magic, something mostly outside of the frame of the game. Zey asked if that would be okay, and said that this wouldn't be to make the character any more effective at jousting. We all agreed that would be fine.

* The player was somewhat nonplussed by some of the reactions to what zeir character said and did. The person playing the character that was supposedly that character's best friend didn't really act like it, and the player felt that zeir character was being pushed into the role of villain. In this case, yes, the player needs one or more PCs to react differently. And again, I do have some sympathy with the player because of the context.

One part of that is that this was a GM-less game where backstory is not just invented at the beginning, but also during play, and there was a degree to which the player was being told that the backstory for the character wasn't what zey'd just said it was. This was a communications glitch, something that probably could have been sorted out if folks had dropped out of character for a few moments.

But when one is playing the game, it's sometimes hard to stop and do this, and it's even hard to recognize what just happened until hours, days, or even weeks later.

* Now, where things get more complicated is that this player wasn't viewing the big picture situation the way the rest of us were. Zey were seeing serious political ramifications and problems for zeir character in ways none of did. The rest of us saw a light-hearted sports game, where, sure, emotions could be intense, hearts broken, friendships lost and possibly reforged, but not a game where anyone would be charged with treason or forced into a political marriage. In other words, we were playing different games, to some degree, and not realizing this. I don't think this was anyone's fault so much as a mismatch of expectations, but I also don't think it would have been appropriate to add the nasty realpolitik elements the player was expecting. So I sympathize, sure, but this isn't one I'd have wanted to change.

* If one considers the setting as an NPC, when a player asks, fr'ex, "What floor are we on?", I've learned to ask "Why?" The player may want a particular answer -- a particular reaction from that part of the setting. And I want to know what reaction the player wants and why so that I can determine whether it's reasonable to supply that.

If the player is hoping that their PC can safely jump out a window, and I haven't got a reason for the room to be on a high floor, I actively *want* to give them what they want. Or if a player wants to know if there's a chandelier or something else the PC can dramatically swing across the room on, then yes, most of the time I want that for them.

* Turning this back to more conventional NPCs, if a player is asking, basically, if an NPC is romanceable, I want to know. I have sometimes said no, and at least some of the time, I think that was a mistake on my part. But it isn't always a mistake to say no. Fr'ex, when Matt Stevens ran his Heartland City game, my cub reporter Henry "Sticks" Tyler tried to romance a woman P.I. Matt decided on the spur of the moment to make the woman a lesbian, and at the end of the session, Sticks spotter her making out with her girlfriend and was heartbroken.

And this was awesome! Throughout the session, whenever Sticks made what might be a romantic move or might not, the woman asked if this were professional, and he immediately said it was. She was in no way leading him on. There was absolutely no reason she couldn't be homosexual. I didn't need "yes, this is a romanceable NPC". "This is a woman who absolutely has a life outside of her interactions with your PC" was the correct note to hit.

I'm not sure the woman ever knew Sticks had a crush on her. She and her girlfriend showed up periodically, and Sticks did his best to be Mature about the whole thing, inadvertently helped by his editor, who knew that the woman was homosexual and said something to Sticks about both of them being men of the world and aware that homosexuals existed. It wasn't quite as positively phrased as that, you understand; it was a bit comedic. And that's part of why the whole thing was appropriate; Sticks was generally a comedic character, even as he grew up a bit and did what he could for his city.

* Communication is key. This is obvious, but we all screw it up from time to time. If I am playing a woman warrior in a culture that doesn't approve of women fighting, or if I am playing a Black man in a Call of Cthulhu game set in the 1920s, do I want my character to face prejudice? Do I want to not deal with this aspect at all? Do I want to have it be in the background, but not a big deal? The GM and I need to talk about this.

One woman talked about how she played one D&D game and then, I think, didn't play again for years. What happened was she was flipping through one of the books, and saw a Drow woman with a sword. Not knowing anything about the background, she saw a white-haired Black woman who looked like her grandmother, carrying a sword and looking totally badass. She wanted to play that.

The GM asked, "Are you sure?" and she said she was. He let her create the character, and as soon as the character showed up, the other PCs killed her, because that was a Drow, and everyone Knew that Drow are evil. The woman's takeaway, as she said, was "Ah, so you all think it's totally fine to murder someone who looks like my grandmother for existing."

With 20-20 hindsight, she noted that the GM was trying to clue her in that playing a Drow was a bad idea. But given that she didn't know anything about the game, the GM was going about this the wrong way. He should have said, "Okay, this is not a human woman. This is a Drow woman. The Drow are a different race, one that is considered evil. If you play a Drow, everyone will assume you are evil." The player might well have decided not to create any character and to just walk away, or she might have decided to modify her character concept, perhaps playing a human woman who was Black, white-haired, and carried a sword. Either way, she would not have been blind-sided by the rest of the group instantly murdering her character.

* For something less high stakes, let's say my character's bow breaks. If none of the PCs can fix it, then I need and want there to be an NPC willing to repair my PC's bow at a price they can afford. How reasonable this is depends on the setting. If the PCs are in or quickly travel to a large city, I would be very surprised and displeased to be told that there's no one who can fix the character's bow for a price they can afford unless the GM has a satisfactory reason for why this is the case.

And the GM well might, of course. But if this is a typical fantasy rpg, defined as "the PCs are a party and do things that will almost always involve combat" and if my PC's primary weapon is the bow, if the character can't get that bow repaired or replaced, I'm being told that my character doesn't get to do the things I created them to do.

If it's a historical setting, or one modeled on history, then the GM has hopefully explained about how difficult it is to do something like get a bow fixed or replaced ahead of time, or at least, has done so as soon after the bow breaks as possible. And hopefully, the GM has things for my PC to do that don't make me feel like I might as well roll up another character and hand this one to the GM to use as an NPC.

* Similarly, if the PCs are supposed to rescue someone from a dragon's lair, let's say, they need a way to reach that lair. If they don't already have one, and there's an NPC who does, then they want that NPC to be helpful. If not, then they expect the setting in the person of the GM to find a way for them to do the adventure the GM is expecting them to do.

re Lee re contacting elected officials: I have also been doing this.

GABRIEL ROARK: I'm glad you're off the hook for jury duty.

MICHAEL CULE: re disposing of games: Good luck. When we went to Intercon W, we brought some costuming for the costume swap. As we left the swap, Josh noted that a lot of folks who don't bring costuming to swap probably think they shouldn't come, or if they do, that they should only take one or two things, regardless of how many they might want. However, based on what we saw, this is not true. Indeed, we want more people to bring nothing and take an armful or two of costuming. I don't know if it's the same with games, though.

I'm glad you enjoyed the full Fall of Magic, though sympathy on the sundry aches and pains. How did your panel with Gareth Ryder-Hanrahan go? re where the sweet spot between Monster of the Week and GURPS is: With the caveats that I've not played a lot of MotW and that this reflects my biases, my brain goes to:

* Fate and/or Over the Edge, because of course it does
* Swords of the Serpentine or possibly Trail of Cthulhu, but not Night's Black Agents
* Possibly Chaosium's BRPS or some flavor of it -- Pendragon, Rivers of London, Call of Cthulhu, et cetera
* R. Talsorian's system of Stat + Skill +1D10 where Stats and Skills go from 1 or 0 to 10, iirc

I am not sufficiently familiar with Modiphius's 2d20, Cubicle 7's c7d6, or Free League's Year Zero Engine to know whether I'd put those on the list. I need more of a feel for the system for City of Mist, Tokyo Otherscape, QUUERZ!, and Legend in the Mist as well. I wonder if Clockwork: Dominion would work as well.

re ightheme: For Graham's semi-fallen angel, I'd recommend the too-much-of-a-good-thing approach, ala the 2nd season episode of Buffy: The Vampire Slayer "Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered". Let there be people obsessed with the angel, and people jealous and wanting vengeance, and if these too get seduced, well, then they're jealous of others. Maybe someone wants to tap this marvelous power and use or abuse it. And yes, maybe demon hunter types see this fallen angel as a threat.

re me re wanting REIGN for a campaign in that setting, but not for a one-shot: That makes sense. re party of Woosters with one Jeeves: I'm not sure I'd enjoy playing the Jeeves in that group. re Paul Holman: If you do make a Powered by the Apocalypse or Forged in the Dark hack for Night's Black Agents, I want to see it.

re Mark Nemeth re Job re how maybe one is forced to obey a more powerful being, but that does not mean it is a moral obligation: This reminds me of the Nobilis larp Josh and I played in years ago. One woman played an elderly Chinese woman (and did an amazing job of making us believe that she was frail, elderly, and tiny

when she was, in fact, none of the three) who'd learned that her family was being kept in poverty because the forces of the universe, i.e., the Nobilis characters, had decided to use that family as a sort of baseline, I think somehow kind of keeping the universe in some kind of cosmic order. The character was furious about this, and very quietly and cleverly did some subtle sabotage that none of us ever suspected. The fact that my character, Death, had kidnapped her daughter so as to blackmail her did not help. (I'm not entirely sure why my character did this, as that was the part of the game where we gave sealed envelopes to other players to create relationships, not knowing the details. She gave me one labeled "For an enemy" with this information.) And my out of character reaction is, "Good for her!"

PATRICK ZOCH: re The Law: There's another situation I now recall. I once played in a test of using Fate for a Lovecraftian adventure. It was fun, and I think the GM was doing a lot of improvising and letting us shape the adventure in some very wacky ways. One of the PCs was a cop, and she was very, ah, good about finding something of great interest to stare at when another PC had to do something of dubious legality, like pick a lock. When she turned around again, hey, I guess that door was just open after all!

re NPCs re Call of Cthulhu requiring players to name "several significant people" for their PC: This is an addition to 7th edition, and I'm fairly sure that not all GMs require it. I only created one NPC for my character in Gaylord's Harlem Unbound game. It's not that William didn't find more NPCs to care about even fairly early on, but I didn't create more than the one.

Interesting that you say NPCs in Call of Cthulhu are "merely" plot hooks, as some might thing that a plot hook NPC is somehow more interesting or important than a companion, animal or otherwise, that functions as basically an extension of the PC. How is a plot hook NPC different from a Magical Kitty NPC? Both could well be "the purpose for the adventure", surely?

NPCs in Call of Cthulhu are often in an odd situation. They usually fall into obvious roles, such as: victim, villain, source of information. At least two of these are "the purpose for the adventure", IMO. Sure, there are NPCs that are just normal people, but I presume that's true of Magical Kitties Save the Day as well? At least, one would hope so.

re superhero games: There is some variety here, of course. Fr'ex, Masks, a Powered by the Apocalypse game, has potential victims, ordinary citizens, villains -- and adults. The PCs are teenaged superheroes, and their attributes are their labels -- how high or low their Danger, Freak, Savior, Superior, and Mundane labels are will shift back and forth, based on how others see you, or, to put it another way, on the Influence others have over you. By default, all adults have Influence over the PCs.

re Red Market: Interesting. While not precisely what happens with Connections in Good Society, it's not that far from it either. Other games have done similar things as Red Market, of course. Sorcerer and Monsters and Other Childish Things encourage groups to have each PC's demon / monster played by a player other than the PC's player or the GM.

It definitely makes a difference. As I noted last issue, having a local prohibition explained by PCs hits very differently than when it's explained by NPCs. The latter is similar to "just a line on the character sheet", while the former gets a reaction beyond "Yup, okay, that's a rule, got it, moving on".

The Delta Green rpg covers similar ground as Red Market, which is not exactly surprising, especially given that Caleb Stokes has written for Delta Green. A Delta Green PC faces a dilemma when dealing with the NPCs who constitute their Bonds. On the one hand, these are people who keep them from crumbling and breaking; on the other hand, using one's Bonds this way also hurts the PC's relationship with them. And PCs can choose to focus on strengthening those relationships between missions for Delta Green. Monsters and Other Childish Things does something similar with the PCs' important relationships with humans, generally their parents.

Trail of Cthulhu introduced the idea of Sources of Stability, a number of NPCs based on the PC's Stability who are important and can help the PC regain Stability between adventures. A campaign for this game, Eternal Lies, took this idea and made it sing, talking about ways for the GM to play those NPCs beyond "just a line on the character sheet" and beyond "Dawn got kidnapped again, so it must be Tuesday." This impressed upon me that the way to tell if a group is doing it "right" -- "right" for those of us who want the NPCs to feel like people, not mechanics or a line on the sheet -- is to see if folks are thinking of these NPCs as "Sources of Stability" or as "Jeremiah", "Richard", and "Lily". If you're thinking of them by their name as fictional characters, I consider this a good sign.

This isn't to say that there's no place for NPC as mechanic or plot mover / fifth business. In Good Society's Sense, Sensibility & Swordsmanship hack, fr'ex, there is an Evil Plot Module which walks groups through creating a Big Bad and their Evil Plot. I've facilitated such a game, and I've played in one. The Big Bad did feel more like a mechanic than a fictional character, but this didn't really hurt the game.

I'm not saying it wouldn't be better if the Big Bad felt more like a fictional character. I think that would be awesome. But it's okay if that's not the case, so long as the other characters and the relationships between them feel solid. A group or a facilitator playing this hack is already juggling a lot of details and characters, so it's forgivable if this one is something of a windup toy keeping things going.

SPIKE JONES: Continued and continuing sympathy on the workplace situation. re Lee re flu vs COVID lethality: I'd been told that the latter is three times as deadly as the former, as in three times as many people die from COVID as from the flu. I don't know what source the person who told me that got it from, and it was some months ago. What source are you using?

re Lee: Oof. Sympathy and concern about the logistics of travel with a Green Card and renewal of same. re what investigators found in Menendez's home: *Boggle!* I cannot fathom where one hides the cash and in what denominations, nor do I have a sense of how heavy the gold bars are.

re Michael Cule re the columnist's advice to teachers: This reminds me of something I remember Naomi Rivkis talking about. I think someone in college accused their roommate of making a voodoo doll of them and sticking pins in it, and the correct response to hearing about this was "At least one of these two students has a problem / is troubled." (I forget the exact wording.

re Joshua Kronengold re Agatha All Along: It wasn't the origin story that I fell for. That said, it's actually an origin story for three characters -- the two you mentioned and one other, whom we see flying away before the denouement.

re me: Thanks for the clarification about the Human Torch. re Amber rpg expecting players to continually contribute art, writing, et cetera when the reward is a one-time fairly small thing: Yes, exactly. re shopping non-evilly: As Patrick Riley said in Ever and Anon #1, The Good Place goes into detail considering this issue.

JIM ECKMAN: I wonder if we met at the 2018 Worldcon. re me: Having done the equivalent of writing a book (Ph. D. dissertation, co-authoring 50K words with Joshua Kronengold for a REIGN rpg setting, currently working with him on a Good Society rpg hack, and having co-authored various larps), I would have to say that the solo journaling game I did was easier. I'm not sure about other solo journaling games, as I've not yet played any. I do enjoy keeping in-character journals for some rpgs, or writing in-character letters (very useful to like that if one is playing Good Society), so I may be biased.

MARK NEMETH: I hope that the retirement process continues to go smoothly for you from this point on. The whole thing sounds like a very uncomfortable roller coaster ride (and I am not a fan of such rides to begin with). RAE write up and am amused that you now need to follow a dead body protocol to keep deceased opponents from continuing to be a problem.

re Lee re Larry Niven: Yes, yes it is *the* Larry Niven. re me: I'd consider Brand closer to a Byronic hero than Luke. I wonder if Dorothy Dunnett's Lymond is a Byronic hero, though I tend to think of him as more complicated than that. If I've not already recommended the series, I'd say try her Game of Kings. If you don't like it, don't go further -- unless the only reason you don't like it is that you think Dunnett is being too nice to her protagonist.

COMMENTS ON EVER AND ANON ISSUE #2

JOHN REDDEN: There's a stage version of Murder on the Orient Express? Fascinating! re Invasion: Oof. Good pun, fwiw.

Dave ran Horror on the Orient Express? Wow. Depending on which edition he has, it's either a long campaign or a VERY long campaign. re Dr. Smith: If you remember, what previous scenarios was he in? re getting trapped on the train with dead passengers: I wonder how this run compared to the text. When I read that particular chapter, I wanted to take it out of the campaign and run it as a larp because, as written, it has two useful features:

* The action takes place in a Box, which is to say a location that the PCs can't really leave. This is very convenient for larps. The train, of course, is the box in this case.
* For Reasons, clues are also confined to the Box. This doesn't guarantee they'll be found and properly understood, but it does help.

At least, this is assuming I'm thinking of the correct train sequence. I may be getting my scenarios confused. There are a lot of weird train sequences in this campaign, for some reason. Can't imagine why.

At this point, does the group have any pieces of the statue? I look forward to the next installment. I'm very curious about whether David is running the full current campaign or cutting some of it. There are a lot of scenarios, and one decision any GM running this must make is which scenarios, if any, to ditch.

re Norway trip: I'm glad your foot was in, er, good hands. The pictures look lovely. I'm amused, though I shouldn't be at all surprised, that mail delivery was one of the jobs of the ship.

BRIAN ROGERS: Hi! The zine title absolutely works. re 13th Age: I'm trying (not particularly hard) to figure out a) whether I'd enjoy a 13th Age game as much as I enjoy Stephen Tihor's Strixhaven 5e/2024 game (aka reasonably entertaining, and with D&D Beyond and Josh's help, I can handle, well enough, such mechanics as I need to know), b) if my judgment that I'm not the right person to gm either system is correct (pretty sure it is), and c) what system, if any, to use if, at some point, I, nevertheless, get an overpowering urge to run Eyes of the Stone Thief (which I think of as Moby Dick: The Dungeon). It likely won't happen as there are So Many Games I want to run that I'm confident I can run well.

I'm very curious about your Swords of the Serpentine campaign. I'm currently playtesting Pillars of Sand, Pelgrane's forthcoming campaign for the system. To me, SotS isn't exactly a mystery game. I mean, yes, sometimes it is, and it can certainly handle mysteries, but thinking of it as being as much about "solving a problem", as the book says. It also notes that adventures can be heists and other things. Possibly, I'm letting myself be distracted from the mysteries that exist in the scenarios by the swashbuckling, action, and ton of options that the players have in deciding what to do with what they know.

re The Eye: This... feels like the Good Twin of Sauron-as-Evil-Eyeball. (There's a filk by Sibylle Machat that starts with the conceit that Sauron is literally an eyeball. A lidless eyeball. See https://ovff.org/pegasus/songs/evil-eyeball.html, although it doesn't have the various ad-libs she tosses in, particularly the one asking precisely how the lord of the black land is supposed to "come forth" given "I am the eyeball, and the stress here is on eyeball" -- "What am I supposed to do, roll? Have you *seen* the roads here?")

I like the idea that Jack Barrister is the pet of The Eye. Shades of Mr. Peabody and Sherman. re solo game vs Gumshoe: You don't have to choose! There are now (calculates) at least four flavors of solo Gumshoe, aka One2One:

* Cthulhu Confidential (for Trail of Cthulhu)
* Solo Ops (for Night's Black Agents)
* Paragon Blade (forthcoming, though you may still be able to pre-order and get the un-laidout text file now, fantasy setting that can be flavored in a variety of ways, including Conan-esque and Lankhmarian)
* Alteregomania (haven't yet read it, but it's set in "a universe of corrupt superheroes")

I'd go with Paragon Blade as your base, as I think it's the easiest to hack into what you want. I could see using Cthulhu Confidential, and I definitely recommend against Solo Ops, as that doesn't have the feel you're going for. I don't know enough about Alteregomaia.

re the maturity gap between 12 and 14: Yep. Not universal, I'm sure, but I remember one young player in the first run of our Ghost Fu larp, definitely a bit of a chaos goblin. Not a problem in the run, partly because one of the other players came to the GMs and suggested we do something for the young player, so I played a demon that the character could beat up. (This went even better than I'd hoped, as one of the other characters had tangled with the demon I was playing, and warned the other against the demon and, when the young character was adamant about fighting, offered training.)

A year or two later, the same player was in another one of our larps, I think Jamais Vue. And wow, the difference! The player was now a lot calmer and good about stepping in to help when one of the GMs (Hi!) got a bit overwhelmed by the usual chaos that is a larp.

re introducing one part of character creation at a time: I like the trend I'm seeing with some companies creating scenario collections to teach their game step by step. re charts: I love flow charts myself, although some are more useful than others.

re Alire: Wow, trident and net! I think some NPCs in some of the Cthulhu Invictus scenarios use that combination, but I'm not sure I've seen anyone with a PC do that. re Sir Kai III: So he's studied heraldry, basically? re Sol and wanting to be dark and edgy: I think we all wanted that at one point, and sometimes, we still occasionally want it, even when much older. But yeah, it lands differently at 13. re Nugera: Clockwork budgie! Alchemically changing genders is a brilliant hack. *Giggle* at the explanation for the name "Numina". re Xela: If the player wants to change the OUT later, obviously (as in I know you know this), let them. OTOH, I doubt "proud father of an animated skeleton" is particularly common. I'm glad splitting the groups helped.

re Paul Holman re "stress of ‟do we press on with our ever dwindling pools or do we let the opposition have time to advance their plans (and we develop new problems trying to keep the guild running)”": Interesting. This sounds like Blades in the Dark (though maybe that should be the other way around).

PATRICK RILEY: I was supposed to talk about my gaming journey? re mechs: It strikes me as both hilarious and fitting that your character having the smallest mech meant they were the squad commander, although the actual play experience nightmarish. re 5 hour block being 3-4 hours of play: Nod. That seems normal for home groups. When I play games with folks on the Storybrewers Discord, it's usually for a very

focused 3 hour slot with a ten minute break around the midpoint. Probably at least 2 1/2 hours of play, presuming we don't go over by more than five minutes.

The focus is because we've all signed on for X number of sessions, generally 4-9, and after those X number of weeks, everyone's almost certainly booked the slot for something else. We all know there's little chance of making up a session if we cancel, and we're likely to cancel if even one player can't make it.

In contrast, the home games I run, while also online, are more laid back. We touch base, ask how everyone's doing, chat while folks log in, recap what happened last time, as we've all likely forgotten some of the details, and game for 2-4 hours, depending on in-game situation, how much I've prepped (as in how much I've prepped for, not how much prep time I've spent), and how much stamina we have. Most of us are on the east coast, but Bryant Durrell is in Seattle, while another gamer is in Barcelona, so in games with both of them, someone is going to be burning their candle at both ends. Heck, even with just the player from Barcelona and east coasters, the former is often playing in the wee hours of their night/morning.

re rules monkey players: I like this term, or rather, I like the idea of using a term that isn't "rules lawyer" for this sort of thing, and "rules monkey" works. I think Bryant and Josh are the rules monkeys in the Fearful Symmetries campaign, and currently, in the Swords of the Serpentine campaign I'm playtesting. For Fearful Symmetries, we're doing a lot of house ruling, and it's helped make the campaign feel both fun and high (relative to the genre) magic.

re hunting adventure: I like the set up and complexity. Kudos to the group for arranging a hunt for a normal animal. re chimera breath weapon: I didn't know it had to "recharge". Is this a timed thing or a "roll every X rounds to see if it recharges" thing? If it's the latter, the fact that it *could* have recharged adds an interesting bit of tension. re Roland not getting the kill shot despite folks' best efforts: While not ideal, it would have been worse to let the chimera get away, correct?

re escort adventure: I wouldn't have guessed haunted house. My first thought was that Lady Fiona had committed the murders herself. Why did the wraith think the servants were a threat to its progeny? (Was Lady Fiona its progeny or did she marry in and thus count because of that?)

I love the idea that, even though the ghosts can fade through walls and floors, they took the stairs out of habit. I agree that the temporary hp should absorb some of the damage; that's basically what they're there for. re bumping off a PC not being fun: This is a reason I don't love most games that allow for/encourage/mandate this. Even in games like Call of Cthulhu, it's often better not to go for a kill.

In particularly, meaningless random death generally turns me off a game. I want cool narrative arcs. This means that I benefit from session zeros and careful choices of what game to play and what scenario/campaign to run or improvise. I've read through Cloud Empress, and I found that it's at odds with itself, or at least seems to be. It wants to create a setting of wonder and a setting where people matter, but the system is designed with high lethality. Now, if you want a certain amount of realism or simulationism (bearing in mind that I consider these artistic terms, which is to say that "realism" and "realistic" are genre conventions every bit as much as "surrealism" or "movie logic") more than you want the kind of what I'm calling "story arc" or "narrative" (both of which are imprecise, because they don't convey the sense of collaboration and the messiness that is likely to happen in most groups -- I am NOT talking about anyone or any system imposing an arc or story on hapless gamers), that's not necessarily a problem or deal breaker.

And indeed, I can enjoy high lethality settings where death may be random or meaningless or both, particularly if we're talking a convention one-shot. And if it's deliberately comedic (and I know this going in), I can have a blast with it, as I did with a late night game of Dread where the PCs were the hapless servants of a family that acquired a mogwai and fed it after midnight. It was luck of the draw (from the Jenga tower) that my PC didn't die, while half the players went through three or four characters in rapid succession in a 2 hour game. But it's not my dish of choice most days, and generally not for ongoing campaigns.

On the flip side, sometimes, as folks have noted, one wants, at the very least, the risk of character death. And that means it needs to be a real risk.

DIGRESSION: Sure, players can get, and I have often gotten, a very satisfying game where it *feels* like there's a risk, sure, but there isn't. There was a Star Trek: The Next Generation episode that disgusted me because the writing and acting made me disbelieve in the risk. It's not because the point where I mentally threw up my arms in disgust was 2 minutes from the end. I contrasted it to the original series's "The Immunity Syndrome" where, even though it was the same two minutes from the end, even though I knew the ship would survive (heck, I'd read the synopsis of the episode before I ever saw it!), I believed that it might not. It came down to the writing, and to the acting. END DIGRESSION.

Once one puts in a real risk of death, there's a risk that the death will feel unsatisfying, because of things that won't get resolved. There are a number of ways to handle this, of course, including:

* So be it. If we're putting the risk on the table, it's on the table. We've agreed that this may happen.
* Agreeing that particular scenes only have this risk, and that everyone will know OOC when those scenes are about to happen.
* Saying players need to opt in to their own character's death. Let the dice fall, and if they indicate death, the player decides whether or not to overrule the dice.
* A subcategory of that is to have the player decide when and if their character dies. That is, there's always a risk of character death, but the players have control, not a randomizer.
* Death means death, but it can be delayed until the dramatically appropriate point. Fr'ex, my character may take enough damage that they're dead (or enough SAN damage to take them out of the game, as SAN is essentially mental hit points), but the character doesn't have to drop dead immediately. It can happen at the end of the round, the fight, the scene, the adventure, or some other event where it feels right. This can be a cool way of getting narrative satisfaction and risk that isn't entirely in player control.
* Something weirder. I'm thinking of the Delta Green campaign Impossible Landscapes here, but also Gaylord's Harlem Unbound campaign, where my character took actions a couple of times that he and I both expected would lead to character death, and it would have been fine if they had. I was fine with Gaylord ruling otherwise. In one case, something supernatural happened, and enough had been established that this made sense. In the other, he ruled that the character was in danger of dying, but rapid medical attention (which was available) brought him up to a lone hit point. I'm glad that this didn't keep happening, as that would have gotten absurd, but in those two cases, it worked for me. In one of Stephen Tihor's campaigns, Josh's PC made a deal with someone via his familiar, an infernal bat, to get out of dying. Of course, that was a D&D campaign, so coming back from the dead was not unexpected.

re long rest: I don't love that sort of thing most of the time. Sometimes, it makes sense to me, or at least as much sense as first aid skills doing something similar in Trail of Cthulhu. I have always been fine with the original Over the Edge's rule that half the damage in a fight (at least, if serious weaponry doesn't come into it) vanishes by the end of the next scene.

re the plot hole you found: Did the players notice it? re cliffhanger ending: Was it the players or you or both who forgot about Heroic Inspiration? Regardless, sometimes, a cliffhanger ending is just fine.

GABRIEL ROARK: I'm glad your parents are doing well. re Heath Row re caramel apple: You're still ahead of me, as I didn't get it until you pointed it out.

MYLES CORCORAN: Ah, the poor put-upon kitties. Someone needs to order them better weather. re Mausritter: I'm very impressed by the electrical tactics. *Giggle* at "I'm not that kind of frog!" So how did a man wind up with a frog body?

re whether one uses player and PC names or just PC names in write ups: For me, it depends on a few factors:

* Have I forgotten which way I usually do it?
* Do I know all of the player names? If I'm gaming at a convention, I may not.
* Do I know all of the character names?
* Has anyone asked not to have their name used? Do I have reason to believe anyone would prefer I not use their name?

ATTRONARCH: Okay, so Red Dragon in this context is a drug that makes the user belch fire, correct? How did you run the fight against all those rats? The ghost children sound oddly charming, all things considered.

PEDRO PANHOCA DA SILVA AND MAIRA ZUCOLOTTO: That's a nice variety of adventures. And I see a familiar name among the authors!

GEORGE PHILLIES: re Telezy Amberdon fan fiction: I played in a campaign set in the Hub universe, using the rules of the original Over the Edge, aka WaRP (Wanton Role-Playing) system. re Brother Gowophilus: Perhaps he could consider his courage a form of cowardice, a matter of being too cowardly to flee?

MARK NEMETH: re Dullstrand: I'm also surprised that no one had iron spikes. I like the way the folks in Krakroc react to the PCs' deeds. re ship voyage: a save the dog moment!

re differences in gming styles: Oh yes. Josh is in 3 D&D games, and each GM has a very distinctive style. Heck, even though Good Society and hacks are facilitated, rather than gmed, the facilitator's style marks the game.

re cooperative and adversarial games: I am far move used to non-adversarial games, even when the GM keeps tight control. I played a convention one-shot game of Burning Empires where Luke Crane told us point blank and up front that he was going to be an utterly adversarial GM. I was fine with this, as not only did he make sure we knew from the start what we'd signed up for, but it also made sense for Burning Empires.

While I like it when the GM is extremely collaborative, it's fine if that's not the case. It's a matter of degree and context.

Gaylord Tang's mantra as a GM is: "How can I make this worse?" I am there for that. And despite that mantra, I don't think Gaylord is an adversarial GM. He isn't playing to "win". He isn't out to get us or our characters. If I were in any doubt about that, his decision to find a rationale not to kill my character in two cases where he had a golden opportunity would have quashed them,

He *is* a very controlling GM, particularly when it comes to information and PCs trying to influence powerful NPCs. I think he's often too stingy with information and a bit too rigid with his NPCs, but with the right game, it's not a problem. In the case of Masks, a Powered by the Apocalypse game, I do wish he'd been freer with information and relaxed his grip on the reins of the game, but with Harlem Unbound for Call of Cthulhu! that tight control worked very well.

The convention game of Call of Cthulhu where the GM planted a ringer and considered it his job to try for a TPK, and was a little sorry he didn't get everyone, but consoled himself by allowing as how one survivor to tell the tale was traditional? Absolutely adversarial gming. I enjoyed the game well enough at the time, but it did leave a bad taste in my mouth.

One big reason was how he used his ringer player. She'd played the game before and her character got captured, and they had this happen again. This meant the other PCs couldn't find her character until they saw her, entranced, following other people in the town the PCs were investigating, so they followed her to (most of) their doom,

But here's the thing: This was utterly unnecessary. The PCs had no reason to flee the town or not wander to their doom. They were there to find out how this one town was thriving during the Great Depression, and what they had learned thus far was intriguing, not alarming. None of them knew anything about the mythos. And I would have liked to see where that led without a sudden "one of your companions is gone -- oh, there she is, apparently hypnotized or something".

The GM has a lot of power, and using it for that kind of forced ending is rarely (not never) correct, and this was not one of the times it was correct. Moreover, it quashed player agency. Rather than letting us enjoy have our clueless PCs wander around getting slowly sucked in to their doom, we were pushed onto a scripted track that made how we were playing our characters up to that point irrelevant. If a GM wants something that scripted, they should write a story.

You can have characters be pre-doomed. I have played and enjoyed that kind of scenario. It becomes about how the characters choose to face their doom. Choices were limited and certain things were going to happen no matter what -- but we had agency. It's like a sonnet, the form is fixed, but there is still a lot of freedom within that form.

re Eastlands campaign: I think writing from a GM's point of view is necessarily different than writing from a player's point of view. You see the big picture and have a different sense of what's important. I don't think you need to worry.

Is this the game where evil beings are all demons who are inimical to humanity? If not, why do "humanoid monsters" never "converse, cooperate, or negotiate with humans"?

re Daggerheart: Josh and I played a convention game of this. I like the questions that build relationships amongst the PCs, which is unsurprising as I am used to this from Powered by the Apocalypse games. I have generally understood that folks should negotiate details so that no one is stuck with something they hate.

That said, the important thing is the reason for these questions, which is to build a web of relationships. If your group wants to do that in their own way, that's fine. I see no reason you need to use those specific questions.

I didn't have a problem with the initiative system, but I don't know if your group misunderstood anything or if our GM at the convention was good enough to compensate for the game's weaknesses. I am used to the initiative system where whoever just went picks whoever goes next and everyone must go once per round, and the GM made it feel like that. Or maybe we were all used to the idea that folks get one turn per round and therefore played that way, figuring the GM knew what she was doing (which she did; she was very well prepared).

I'm not generally playing an rpg for sports-like reasons. I really am there for the story. But I don't think that one is obligated to play suboptimally, and it can be a real problem when a game expects this.

That is, if the mechanics mean my character is intrinsically suboptimal, e.g., their STR is low enough there are mechanical penalties, that's fine. And if I decide to play a character who is reckless enough to rush into situations when that's tactically unwise, so long as the rest of the players don't mind, that's fine.

But one of the problems the GM of the recently finished Phoenix Dawn Command campaign had to deal with was that the game assumes that the players will make

tactically suboptimal decisions because they don't do the math correctly. The game as written doesn't work if the players do the math and play smart.

And however much I loved getting into my character's headspace in that game, whatever weaknesses I chose to give him, being stupid in combat was not and never would have been one of them. It would have made no sense. Phoenix Dawn Command is a war story game.

It made no difference that I am not the best at the kind of math Phoenix Dawn Command needs. All of the PCs are in the same wing, the same combat unit. The game isn't really designed for someone to lone wolf it. The game explicitly encourages working together and building mechanical synergies.

This means that if there is even one player who can do the math, everyone benefits. Everyone plays tactically smart. There is no good reason not to do this. The fate of the world is at stake!

This meant that the GM did a lot of careful calibration to make sure the opposition was truly challenging, and that he planned for a longer game than the author expected. The idea is that Phoenixes have 7 lives and get more powerful after each death, so every mission should theoretically result in at least one or two PCs dying. But the mechanics don't do this if the players make the correct tactical and strategic decisions, and there is no good reason not to.

That said, one problem advice like "jump in and act like a story character" is sometimes intended to solve is analysis paralysis or over-cautiousness. I am not there for endless tactical debate about what to do next. I know some players will absolutely do something, anything, to get to the action already, and I think I've been that player sometimes. It's even worse if a group dec8des to do what, iirc, Brian Rogers called "turtling" and hole up in a secure base, refusing to do anything unless forced to.

Josh and I played briefly in a HeroQuest game where one PC was the leader of a unit of NPC soldiers on an exploratory expedition, and the other PCs chose to travel with them for a certain measure of safety. And everyone except the commander's player understood that this was a campaign about exploring a wondrous world.

Every time the group approached something interesting, the commander had the same reaction: mark the location on the map and move on. No one had told him to do anything else. The rest of the characters somehow managed to explore and find wonder and danger. The commander's player's attitude is exactly what the advice to just jump in and act like a protagonist, say, an action film is meant to counter.

Some of the Gumshoe games frame this differently. Night's Black Agents says that the PCs are highly competent agents, and whatever plan they come up with is the best plan. Sure, as GM, I will tell players if something they're considering definitely won't work, but I will otherwise work with what they give me. This doesn't mean I will chuck my plans out the window or give them a cakewalk. It means we're there to play, not plan endlessly, and I'm not there to go "Gotcha!"

re Patrick Riley re motivations: I have often found fictional characters' motivations interesting. I have also found some characters' motivations boring or disappointing. Often, yes, they're neither, existing to make the story go, like an engine or maybe fuel -- but not always. I was fascinated by the emperor's actual motivation in the novel *Dune* and found it very satisfying; I am annoyed that absolutely no movie / miniseries version of the book ever kept that.

re Ring Shout: I enjoyed it, but it's not my favorite from that author.

DYLAN CAPEL: re Andor (which I have not yet seen) re what a deceased infiltrator's family thinks: This reminds me of the premise of the rpg Spire. Are you familiar with it? re spreadsheet keepers: I have a love-hate relationship with these. Done well, they can hold a lot of information, but I can rarely seem to get the text big enough to comfortably read without making it so big I have to keep moving around in the keeper. re Fallen: Do you mean this one? https://perplexingruins.itch.io/fallen

MICHAEL CULE: re six gods: I'm fine with male equivalents. Heck, I remain fairly annoyed that one can find many, many, many pages of material on Jung's anima, and very little on the animus. (I also remain annoyed that the Bluebeard's Heir remix of Bluebeard's Bride only flips the Animus to the Anima and does nothing else to factor in the gender shift, but that's another matter.)

I'm not sure I'd go for "Son" as a name, myself. I'd probably look for something that vibed more like "Maiden", which is not the same as "Daughter". Closest I can come up with in ten seconds is "Youth", which isn't great. In both cases, what I want to emphasize is the freedom aspect.

Of course, I don't think of the Maiden as "on the cusp of entering the world" or as an "object of adoration". I think in terms of "a young, unattached woman", which means I want "a young, unattached man" for the counterpart. This isn't exactly what you're going for.

I do like "Uncle" as the equivalent of "Crone". I could argue that crones can be of any gender, but again,

that's very much not what you're going for. Both, one could argue, have elements of gender queerness. I remember reading an interview with Glenda Jackson about her performance as King Lear in a production where Gloucester was also played by a woman. Jackson said that as one gets older, "those absolute barriers which define our gender begin to crack" (https://www.nepm.org/2019-05-06/glenda-jackson-and-ruth-wilson-on-king-lear-and-challenges-for-women-in-theater and https://www.npr.org/transcripts/716305342).

re Terraforming Mars: I've not played it (or SETI). Ada Palmer said that if one plays Terraforming Mars cooperatively, instead of competitively (which is not, as I understand it, the way one is supposed to play), one can terraform Mars far more quickly and efficiently.

re Glorantha game: I'm innocent of the history the characters are about to step into. I'd totally have gone for one of the envelopes as well. Was it Graham or Vostor who left the paper with the contact mission behind?

re igtheme: When I use a published scenario or campaign, the opposition is usually statted out, so I don't have to do that. For Dracula Dossier, I described the 1894 Dracula in 7 pages, using the Telleuric version, much of which I cobbled together on my own. (I am annoyed that everyone goes for Linea Dracula, including the published material. Why the heck do you do that in the Director's Handbook when you've gone to the trouble of creating the Telleuric vampire?) I see the 1940 version is about the same length. I don't see a 1977 or 2015 version, but I know that the basics are the same -- some powers get less expensive to use, Aberrance grows, and some blocks are less effective.

I don't think he used any abilities in the 1894 leg. In 1940, he tried to hypnotize Hedy Lamarr, one of the PCs, and failed so hard that he didn't realize he'd failed. He and the PCs had an uneasy alliance. He never showed up in 1977 (or 1948, 1981, 1989, or 2005). I never finished the 2015 leg, though I did shift to a hack of Swords of the Serpentine Josh and I world on, dubbed Agents of the Night, in the same game world, and he did appear briefly. I don't recall whether I statted him up then.

I think I did need to stat him up when I did. I needed to see how to do this sort of thing, and how powerful he seemed at any given stage. I also discovered over the course of the various mini-campaigns and one-shots exactly how I was misplaying other vampires, who were far too easy to defeat, until I ran "Four Days of the Bat", where I got it sufficiently right that the minions who appeared in that scenario were challenging to the group.

If and when I get back to Agents of the Night, I'll need to do a lot of recalibration, both on the system/mechanics level and on the plot/pyramid level. I know what I'm aiming for, and I know some of the mistakes I made before (specifically, trying to shoehorn too much of Zalozhniy Quartet in -- Treason in the Blood is a bad fit for what I'm doing, so I need to either omit it entirely or use only one or two minor bits, probably the first). re comments and putting Lee's name first: Agreed.

PAUL HOLMAN: RuneQuest is up to 7E, not 6E?

PATRICK ZOCH: Yes, villains use the stuff they have, just like PCs do. re George Phillies re characters with entourages: Fellowship, a hack of Dungeon World, which is itself a hack of Apocalypse World, gives all playbooks options for followers. I'm not sure if any playbook *must* have any; I know that the person playing the Halfling took all the Snacks option and noted that the character could feed half a town with the food they carried on their person.

JIM ECKMAN: re sf settings: Call of Cthulhu does have some scenarios set in the future, and one can certainly consider the mi-go, yithians, and similar beings and their technologies to be sf elements. Delta Green is probably even more sf in feel. CthulhuTech is explicitly sf-y, though as with any sf game, I am not necessarily aware of how good the science is.

Other sf games I'm aware of include:

* Ashen Stars and Gaean Reach (Gumshoe, Pelgrane)
* Blade Runner (Year Zero, Free League)
* Blue Planet (Biohazard Games)
* Cowboy Bebop (Mana Project Studios)
* Cyberpunk (current version: Cyberpunk Red, R. Talsorian) and various other cyberpunk games
* Dune: Adventures in the Imperium (2D20, Modiphius)
* Eclipse Phase (Posthuman Studios)
* Fading Suns (Currently Ulisses Spiele, but other companies have done earlier editions)
* Jorune (not at all new, and probably not in print?)
* Nibiru (Arukana)
* Orbital Blues (Soul Muppet)
* Orun (New Agenda)
* Scum and Villainy (Forged in the Dark)
* Star Trek Adventures (2D20, Modiphius)

I've played one shots of Blade Runner (had a blast), Blue Planet (got to be a dolphin!), Cyberpunk Red (vague on details, but I remember it being fun), Eclipse Phase (fun), Jorune (fun, run by Robert Dushay, who's contributed to A&E), Orbital Blues (we weren't entirely sure how it works; I suspect if I play more of it, I'll get a better idea, now that I've read the rules), and Scum and Villainy (still figuring out Forged in the Dark games).

There are many more, I know, and here are a couple of links listing some of the above and some that aren't above:

https://www.cbr.com/best-science-fiction-ttrpg-tabletop-not-dnd/

https://gnomestew.com/coriolis-my-favourite-sci-fi-ttrpg/

HEATH ROW: Our local store, The Compleat Strategist, contacted me to ask which Free RPG Day products I wanted. re Oh Captain, My Captain!: I mail ordered that one. Looks good, definitely a Descended from the Queen game. re Goblin Quest: Great picture. Does each player pick a goblin from the same clutch or does each player create a separate clutch?

MARK WILSON: We saw Summer Wars and enjoyed it. re Murder Mystery RPG at Origins: Intriguing. This reminds me of a one shot game of Apocalypse World where the GM added some rules to run it as a murder mystery where none of us started off knowing who did it. Throughout the game, we collected clues, which weren't exactly what most people mean by the word "clues". And if someone decided to accuse someone else of the murder, they rolled 2D6 + the number of "clues" the accused had. A full success meant that, yes, the accused had committed the murder. We all understood that the murderer had to be one of the PCs. As you noted, otherwise, there's no point.

CLARK TIMMINS: I never heard of these two modules before reading this, which, in itself, is telling. I agree that organization isn't necessarily going to create meaning -- or, more importantly, player buy-in. There's a chapter in Chaosium's Horror on the Orient Express that presumes the PCs/players will be at interested in what happens to a young couple that have nothing whatsoever to do with the plot of the campaign, which makes me very twitchy.

As for the cut-up method, this made it into 1st edition Over the Edge. But what I'm more likely to see in other games is what I gather is called "oracles". These are random generation tables. I don't know how close you consider them to the cut-up method.

JOSHUA KRONENGOLD: re "dark fantasy school adventures do have notably different core motivations, typically, than regency romances": Yes and no. As you'll recall, the similarities are what drew me to begin working on what we're currently calling Dark Refuge:

* Hierarchical society
* An understood code of how to behave
* Who one associates with and how is a matter of life and death

The original version of Dark Refuge had few, if any, substantial rules differences from Good Society + the magic rules. Moreover, one reason I've never felt moved to create a Lovecraft Society hack is because, IMO, no change from base Good Society is necessary. Just chrome a few things differently and add the extra tropes, and you're done. In comparison, I'd need to do a lot of thinking for Roman Society.

Yes, it was very cool to see how the two groups at DexLite took our concepts and ran with them in very, very different directions. I loved the High Noon moment in the one I facilitated.

re wanting more larps you like on the DexLite schedule: True, but I think you meant more rpgs. re D&D write up: A very satisfactory wrap of that chain of events. re Mark Nemeth re your lawful merchant: That's Dan's game, not Stephen's, correct?

re the Harlem Unbound incident you summarized: I loved that part. I suspect one could have a campaign with that trope being repeated regularly, but I've other things I want to run more.

BRIAN MISIASZEK: That red sun photo is amazing. re Havana Horror: Fascinating! Thank you for the historical overview. re El Fantasma of El Capitolio: I like this. Why is the legend for the floor plan missing some of the numbers?

re "Visiting El Capitolio Construction Site: I think you're missing a "not" in "workers are willing to be here after dark". I think this scenario is solid enough you could get it published in one of a couple of ways, if you want to.

re The Tomb Trap: Sounds like a good pulp scenario. re Machoda's Millions: I could see this being a set up for a Fiasco game where the PCs are the three loyalists.

re Lee re your walk back: Wow. I'm glad you were okay. re me: Next year, Worldcon will be in Los Angeles. The year after, Montreal, and in 2028, Brisbane. Odds are it will be in Dublin in 2029. I have no idea what travel (or tariffs) will be like then. Last time it was in Montreal, we took the train both ways. re Lauren: I'm sorry the participants and parents don't get to see the dance performances online after the live version is over.

Accidental Recall #2

For Ever & Anon #3
© 2025 Joshua Kronengold
eaddr: mneme@labcats.org

Dreamwidth: https://mneme.dreamwidth.org
Gaming blog: https://labcats.dreamwidth.org/ (with Lisa Padol; defunct-ish)
Tumblr: mneme / Mastodon: @mneme@dice.camp
Bluesky: mnemex.bsky.social

Between worldcon and being exhausted after worldcon, I haven't had much time to write, so it's now nearly 3AM EDT on the day after my birthday (that is, the 21st).

There's not a lot to write about. Worldcon in Seattle was fun but I had a lot to do even without a Business Meeting to get to most days; I was one panel, meeting up with old friends (and playing a game with one of them; I like Above and Below: Haunted quite a lot—it's an improvement in many ways on the original and expansions, between making the gathering/work component of the game considerably easier by combining two actions into one, adding the ghosts/ships to make core actions more reliable if you invest in them, and having two actions that benefit from each special attribute. Above and Below is a story-reading game—the core game activity is worker management, but one of the main things your workers do is go out on adventures, at which point another player reads a story from a book to you and you decide what choice your adventurers make, roll some dice, and find out what happens (you want to succeed on the adventure but get an extra bonus if you roll high enough).

I've also managed to get our larp design wiki (where our older larps are stored) back online after PHP upgrades rendered it non-functional without an upgrade, so we should be able to run Ghost Fu at Intercon next year, maybe with a little development time to make it better but not so much that it's onerous.

Comments on Ever & Anon #2, part 1

Cover: I can't say I know which figure is the hair metal cleric, but I'd have to guess it's the hapless one in the front.

John Redden: I was wondering whether you weer having to deal with the nonsense that is the newly empowered I.C.E.

Re CoC adventure: It's mildly surprising that *all* the PCs have high credit ratings. Most of our groups, one or two PCs have high credit ratings and the rest tend to have low ones. But here, I suppose you have a bunch of toffs investigating without anyone with their feet on the ground.

So, what happened to your foot? Was the toe frost-bitten? I hope there were no after-effects.

I, too, miss Lee's monthly game. It wasn't the only game I played in, and it wasn't even I by my lights the best, but it was unique and interesting and irreplaceable.

Brian Rogers: Welcome back to APA-hacking! Hope you stay around for a while!

I think the main issue with the Eye as a PC (as an NPC it's great) is that it's never in any danger. Of course, Jack can be in danger, and the victims the Eye is trying to save can be in danger, but if you're in a game where the other PCs are constantly in danger, not having to worry about one players PC can lack symmetry. Of course, this isn't an issue at all in a solo game, and in a group game you can mitigate it a number of ways—including by giving the other players more to do—or in fact having plots that include the Eye's mundane identity. And in your write up, you attempt to balance things by establishing that the Eye can't interfere in events directly, so while it can't really be hurt in a typical plot, it also can't act directly either; it's strictly a spy/influence, with a mitigating ability to remove/change objects in the scene but not people.

When we were playing/playtesting the Marvel Diceless game, I played a character a bit like this (and a bit like Professor X)—a high intelligence telekinentic/telepath with Astral Travel, who preferred to engage threats in his astral form. It was fun, but it also ran the GMs a bit ragged (Dan and Stephen tag team GMed the group with different plots), though usually the GMs rose to the challenge, introducing threats that could interact with an Astral self, finding useful ways to threaen my PCs sleeping self, etc, and the group was aware that he *had* a physical self.

The library groups sound like a fascinating experience; rewarding, if sometimes frustrating. Having so many limits on your responses when it seemed like one player was there to bully another player must have been maddening. And the 13 year old who was just SO EDGY is incredibly precious; I'm glad she got better.

Patrick Riley: I know a lot of shy and introverted larpers! But it really depends on the game and on what you want out of it.

I'm not sure when stencils were the norm (IIRC, Avram Grumer contributed by stencil once). When I joined, Stencil were still an option, but so was calling Lee up to arrange a modem call, which I did, calling, then connecting my modem to Lee's and sending my zine along via kermit or something, for Lee to print on stencil and include in the APA.

It's fascinating reading the accounts of your 5e game in which the PCs almost all die time and time again (in contrast with Attronarch's game where they actually do die when this happens, but I personally find the near-deaths more satisfying/exciting). People, including you, this issue, complain that D&D5, with its nightly almost-complete resets, is anodyne, rarely presenting threats to the PCs, but then your fights often show the lie to this, as a little misalignment can result in the characters being in deadly danger again and again.

Gabriel Roark: Re zines and imposter syndrome: I assure you, some of your fellow contributors (myself certainly included) write their zines at the last minute and any insight is decidedly accidental. I've been better about this recently but the Worldcon and needing to sleep off recovery from same was right

before the deadline, so as I write this it's only barely not midnight and whatever grace I have on the deadline is granted by the time zone.

Re Philies Gentle Stroll: Phillies was an Alarums Excursions contributor and sent around suggestions about N3F to a selection of contributors before the E&A effort really got off the ground, so naturally some of us had heard about it first even if we weren't otherwise involved in N3F; it started happening earlier.

Myles Corcoran: It's in the TOC, but otherwise it was a little tricky figuring out where your name was on your zine. Regardless, still lovely to see you back!

I'm confused about why a "flip 3" would ever be useful on yourself (except possibly to evade the flip 3s of other players if you can rest before they dig theirs out). It seems like you can keep going whenever you want, so a flip 3 is just like taking 3 turns in a row without a chance to stop in the middle.

The Mouseritter writeup is fun and engaging. I was struck, though, with the "bite of a cat" metaphor—which seems appropriate to us, but for the mousy participants a cat bite would be a far larger thing!

And...the frog knight is actually a human knight cursed to be a frog! That's delightful!

Re not continuing conversations from the last issues of A&E: I may, some day, go back to uncommented A&Es. But it's a daunting task, and I am on pace to have a stack of uncommented E&E sections as well!

I think whether one includes player names in a writeup or not is very much a relationship question between you and your players. After all, the PC name is part of the fiction of your game, but the player name is their own.

Attronarch: Well, that was exciting. I'm unsure how many of the party was still alive by the end of it.

George Phillies: I'm unsure of why if you join an Amber game the second time the players met your character was useless. Sure, you don't get to participate in the auction. But if one reads futhre into the rules (particularly in how you compare PCs and other amberites, who didn't participate in the auction of the current generation at all), it becomes clear that the rankings of the PCs as established by the auction are vastly inflated in imporatnce—it's the relatively values in each stat that matters. And, in fact, a PC that sneakily puts their between session effort into a stat may quickly outpace the PC that is "known" to be the best at that thing but only exceeded their abilities by a small fraction. So unless the GM is preventing new-added PCs from exceeding the max auction values even if they do it secretly, the new PCs are far from useless—and even if they are, as long as the player gets a sense of how many points were spent on auction (giving them a sense of how much Bad Stuff to take), they should be able to catch up nicely.

You list two RPG requests and one fan fiction request—I take it the Telzey Amberdon request was a fiction request and not a TTRPG one? Running a game with PCs on the power level of Eclipse seems like it would be exciting.

Mark Nemeth: I have strong opinions on whether players should combat GM setups with their own strategims; that's where a lot of the fun is.

For instance, see the Battle of Tribute (or whatever one wants to call it) from Dan's campaign. The NPCs plan was to teleport a dragon and support troops into a city in time to destroy a tribute ship so a city's regime change wouldn't be aknowledged by the reigning (and effectively immortal) emperor. (the PCs were not part of this empire but were visitng from the south and had been involved in the regine change on a significant level, so they wanted it to stick). The PCs proceeded to counterspell the teleport and disable the spellcaster, and then when the dragon attempted to fly in solo to set the tribute ship on fire, my character used a "bottle that can hold a ship" to hide the tribute ship, and then, when the Dragon made to flee (having lost more than half its HP on the way in), use another's PC's gust of wind to get close enough to the dragon despite it having gone 180 ft away from the party in one round, then used a "teleprot other" spell to send it back towards the rest of the group, allowing them enough extra attacks to finish it off and prevent further threats from that direction. Three clever moves from PCs (plus the PC who set up the wind barrier that I was able to "ride"), three moves that were much more satisfying than just using the mechanics.

That said, it's important to not have PCs clever actions not make the game go. If the result of the countered teleport was instead that there was no encounter and we could just go home, it wouldn't have been very satisfying.

The other thing is that the meta level really does exist even if the character isn't aware of it. If the PC has a single "best" strategy that they always use, then the GM will naturally design encounters to counter this so other players also have a game. So it's much better for a PC's strongest stratagems to be deployed situationally to deal with hard situations rather than used all the time (of course, one can often justify this as not acting predictably enough to develop a reputation for same, lest enemies anticipate your moves and counter them).

Re ad hoc actions in Daggerheart: The main purpose for this, in my limited experience, is to allow PCs who choose to set up/help another PC to get a turn sooner than if there were strict inititave—and also to make sure their help i is actually relevant, rather than becoming irrelevant as other PCs/enemy actions render it so. of course, a non-functional group could render this non-functional, but non-functional groups are always going to be at least a little broken.

Re "if I do something dumb, it's because I couldn't think of something better." Nah. That just limits the kinds of stories you tell; what's the point of RPing if your character is just you with a thin mask? Part of the point of mechanics that give you a reward for having your character make terrible decisions is that it allows you to play in a more or less gamist fashion while letting your character have genre-appropriate terrible decision making or luck. The "right" decsion is often going to be your character staying home and doing chores, but that just doesn't make for a good story.

Re improv and RPGs: Yes, RPGs have constraints that aren't present in most improv, mostly in that they often are much longer, with earlier decisions continuing to reverberate through the game. This means that sometimes, the answer isn't "yes, and" but "no" or "no, but." A clear "no" can often be better than a weaselly "yes, but," because it cuts off a decision that doesn't work and frees people to go a different direction. Just like with "questions" (which I have only used once in Dagger heart but have use a lot in PbtA games), the ability of players to say "no" to things that don't work for them is just the beginning; the ability to say "no" is the ability to negotiate, so you end up with something that all players involved like.

Your sum up of Gor novels through the lens of the first one is dead on. The first novel is fine; the writing is serviceable and the kink is very much there but bows to the service of the plot. It's in later novels (particularly after the 6th lone I think) where the plot often gives way to extensive diatribes on Norman's ideas of male domination hetrosexual kink; fine enough if you're reading them for the "good parts" (although the situations are, in fact, not particularly detailed but some people like that sort of thing), but certainly, eventually, to the detriment of any sort of plot. Still, there are certainly people whose ideas around the protocols of kink come from Gor, so good on them.

Dylan Capel: Nice to see you back!

Yeah, some in persom mechanics are tricky to represent online. We use a spreadsheet for a lot of things (including, yes, BoB), but one sometimes needs to think outside the box to represent things. Or use a different tool, of course; I'd expect that Tabletop Simulator, where you can put actual objects into the game space and manipulate them, would work better in games where manipulating objects is a key element of gameplay.

Michael Cule: As a city dweller (as many Americans are, although suburbs tend to split out a lot of people who technically live in urban areas but also in houses), my building may have wooden interiors, but brick exteriors, and air conditioning is a necessity in summers. I'm told that in the old world, more people don't use AC even when it's hot because they live in house designs that were adapted to the local climate before modern cooling/heating technology was available, but that's certainly not true here; the historical way you dealt with climate in a building like mine (built after central radiation but before air conditioning) is to keep the windows closed in the winter and open them all up in the summers...which would I suppose work albeit with a lot of heat, but the bugs are annoying so our windows stay closed (and our ACs on) during summers. If only power costs would come down.

Our brief foray into Glorantha was also Lunar. Sometimes you just want to play the other side!

Re the PC in debt to the mob being given a message and told to pass it on and then "do as he tells you"...yeah, the PC is screwed. And then Graham...left the piece of paper with his mission at home! Lovely. Also, Vishi sounds fantastic, like an enslaved Jeeves (with Graham's PC as Wosoter).

"they could have gotten the maps for free from the bureau of T&I but could not have found that office without the maps"—that sounds like it's straight out of the Douglas Adams puzzle game, Bureaucracy.

I do love how people's "secret missions" were happening in plain view and the entire party was aware of them. Because why not?

Re not writing Lee's name as the first entry feeling weird: Right?

I do like the varied and many explainations for dungeons. As said, cosmic holes are a big one (I think that's what they use in "I left my A-rank party"), but there are plenty of others, from "these are the relics of a lost golden age that managed to invent something that killed them" to "no, this entire series of dungeons are just a complicated stage for an alien reality show". And whatever Delicious in Dungeon uses—"the mad mage made this as a magical ecosystem in order to preserve his putatively dead king" I think? It's a bit ridiculous, but in all fairness the main real-world inspiration for such things, that is "some culture's royal tombs got so ornate and elaborate that theives started preferentially targeting them, so there was a whole discipline of complicated layered traps and secrecy to protect a king's tomb even after they were dead and it kept getting more elaborate as further thieves looted even the most secret and trapped tombs" isn't *not* ridiculous.

Honestly one of the least ridiculous "dungeon-like" setups comes from Julian's Spelljammer's game: 5 years (around 2-3 years before the game started, when my PC was "born" full grown) ago, the entire space-orcish empire was wiped out via a magical plague that kills you when you sleep. Those who venture into that area risk that same plague, which continues to be very dangerous, but the treasures of the orcish empire lie, undefended...except for the plague and the undead that arise naturally with no natural predators on these now fallow worlds. Oh, and other adventurers, of course.

And that's it; if you want to go delving in orcish space, you can, and there's a merry trade in NPCs looting these worlds...and sometimes suffering horrible consequences when they try and fail because the wrong person dies in their sleep, goes mad from not sleeping for days on end, etc. The PCs, of course, have a divine rune that is almost completely protective against this "dream-death", but for what should be obvious reasons (for starters, there are other adjoining empires next to the now empty orcish one), are incredibly protective of this rune and unwilling to give or sell it to others...or even for the most part let on that they have it.

Re laying your moral responsibility on an unseen God: Ada Palmer, in *Inventing the Rennaiscance* (which I'm still reading but I've gotten to our last Friend, Machievell and should be done before next issue) groups ethics into three groups: The one where you follow a code of rules. The one where you do what your heart says is good. The one where the results of your actions is good (apparently invented in ~1513 at least as a formal philosophy, unlike the others that go back to antiquity). Of course, laying your burden on a divine rulemaker is a version of #2 (as is having a code of honor), but in practice most moral patterns are a combination of all three.

Pum: I was enjoying the campaign with the purple fungus as well! Ah well.

Mark A. Wilson
mawilson4164@gmail.com
bumblingthroughdungeons.com
RPGGeek: mawilson4

ISSUE #3 (E&A #3 - Sept. '25)

Our new house is lovely, though any house - even a rented one - comes with some headaches. Some minor but persistent bug problems, yard projects and minor repairs continue to occupy some of my free time. This was expected, though, and we do enjoy the new space.

More burdensome is that my girlfriend got laid off from her job a mere week after we moved in together, crashing the sort of honeymoon phase we had with the transition. She'll be fine long-term - the layoff was due to significant company downsizing and lack of seniority, and her work experience should lend itself well to plenty of other opportunities. But it's never easy, particularly when you've not experienced such a sudden career jolt like this. I've experienced several such moments, so I've been there to lend perspective and support.

Thankfully, actually living together has brought no concerns from either of us. The other stuff may be stressful, but cohabitating has felt utterly natural.

Media

We're watching through all of the ***Mission: Impossible movies*** in order, working toward the final one that released recently. Some quick reviews:

Overall, the series is spectacularly solid, particularly for one so long-running. They're popcorn-style action films, so don't expect high art. But most manage to pack in some legitimately heart-pounding moments, and they take themselves more seriously than a lot of other more-mindless action flicks (the more outlandish entries in the *Fast and the Furious* series come to mind).

The first *Mission Impossible* is solid and - despite some dated elements (it's from 1997!) - holds up fine.

M:I2 is the low point in the series, by far. Useful for completionists only. We found ourselves chuckling at the several cringe-inducing moments in the movie's final third.

MI:3 immediately reverses course, and may be my personal favorite in the series. Phillip Seymour Hoffman's villain may be the finest villain in the series, and there are some good creative choices that are both narratively and aesthetically satisfying.

Four, five and six maintain form and along with three made this a favorite series for me.

The 7th (Dead Reckoning) missteps a bit imo, though perhaps in part due to the expectations set by the earlier films. It's also the first time I started to get a bit annoyed at how they portrayed Ethan Hunt (Tom Cruise's character) as too much of a deific savior figure. The series is at its best when he's slightly out of his depth, clearly vulnerable, and feels smaller than the events around him. MI:3 showed him at his most fallible and terrified, and I felt that this was him at his most human and relatable. By the final films, he's an espionage demigod whose love for humanity knows no bounds. Clearly I think one archetype works better for telling compelling stories than the other. In all, though, outside of the 2nd film, I'm surprised and pleased at how much entertainment they've provided for me.

RPGs

Still working on a campaign writeup from our recently finished campaign. In lieu of that, some thoughts on the new D&D 5.5e books:

A franchise like D&D needs to cater to new audiences almost constantly, and so the new Player's and GM's manuals aren't really for me, so to speak. I could gloss over entire sections on running the game, for instance.

Mostly, though, I found these new books to be exactly as promised: a refined and more coherent 5e. They've had a decade to figure out what didn't quite work. And while they were never going to "fix" all of the stuff that annoyed me (summoning mechanics in general, the Ranger class, etc.), they touched on a lot things that amounted to "cleanup" in my eyes.

I also found myself enjoying many of the new magic items and spells. Several will appear in future campaigns I run.

The Weapon Specialization system felt like an unnecessary addition for me, mostly because I don't need more mechanical crunch in my combat. I'm not sure what

spurred that change, and I think they could have found more streamlined ways to rebalance weapons. My other minor gripe is an inevitable part of such transitions: a lot of ancillary, official materials they'd built out for 5e didn't get any love. I'm sure many of these are coming in forthcoming books, but it seems a loss to me.

They've also decided to use Greyhawk as the default setting for these books, whereas Forgotten Realms was the go-to in 5e. No issues there; I'm less familiar by far with Greyhawk, but can mine setting materials from any edition for my games. So their focus here doesn't hinder my GMing in the slightest. There's a nice, large, two-sided tear-off map of Greyhawk (the realm and the city, respectively, on either side) that comes with the GM's Guide, which is cool.

Alice is Missing (AiM) RPG

This is an RPG that's intended to play out over texts. Yes, it's very Gen Z. But it also transitions smoothly to Discord servers, which is where I played it with four other friends recently.

AiM is a mystery of sorts, but this is the wrong framing. It's a character exploration, first and foremost. The titular Alice is missing and you play one of several friends or acquaintances, all with complicating connections among one another. The local efforts to find her haven't turned up anything and so, like any plucky teens from an 80s film, you put it upon yourself to find her.

The locations and some events are scripted, and are revealed at specific moments in the game's run-time (it's on a timer). You react to these and flesh out the generic reveals with more details. The mystery will always reach a resolution at the end; some resolution details vary depending on a few factors, but really it's the journey that matters.

One friend sunk into the role of Alice's depressed, rebellious best friend whose guilt over leading Alice down some darker paths threatened to unravel her emotionally. Dark stuff, so it takes some maturity to roleplay. He enjoyed himself quite a bit. The experience was very inward-looking though, which is my point about it being more about character than plot.

I was the older brother, worldview tempered by a turn to religiosity recently and slightly harsh toward some others in Alice's circles, but ultimately kind-hearted and understanding that everyone wants her safe and happy. There was some unspoken romantic tension between me and the aforementioned friend; not fully explored, but obvious to us both in the session's denouement.

So…Alice can die. And she did in our session. The aforementioned friend may have as well. We actually ended up leaving this ambiguous, and had two versions of the after-story, one where she lived and one where she didn't.

I've glossed over some other aspects of the story, but enjoyed myself immensely. 90 minutes or so can go really quickly when you're typing in private messages to four others, sharing secrets and information and also emotionally exploring various relationship, AND posting to a group message where all of those private conversations are sub-text to whatever's being said publicly. It's quiet, moody, contemplative, and was satisfying.

I'd play again, likely with one of the other archetypes. I think the premise and format can work across multiple sessions, though the game as-is is a bit bounded to its name. There are only so many "teen girl goes missing" permutations I'd want to roleplay before I'd be done with it. But expanding the premise would be welcome, so that its reveal system and texting system could be used in different story structures.

Game Design: Email Newsletter and Discord

Following enough interest from friends, Convention-goers and design circles, I started an email newsletter devoted to my design efforts as well as a private Discord server for updates and - more so - periodic live playtests.

Links to join either are included below, should anyone reading this feel so motivated.

I maintain a gaming website that releases steady blogs, an increasing number of them focused on design. The newsletter will have a mix of topics, both design-related and general-gaming.

The actual initial number of sign-ups for both was both under the number I imagined based on prior interest, and somewhat expected since I'm familiar with drop-offs in stated intent vs. action in any digital realm. Still, it's exciting to be "branding" my efforts a bit and curating a small following. Anyway, the links:

Email Newsletter Signup Form:
https://forms.gle/9Qdq8Z851VVwDBUh7

Discord Server Invite Link:
https://discord.gg/Xrdp9M4kYS

Responses to E&A #2

Mark Nemeth
Re: merging campaign ideas, ambitious and amusing to think about, but the I fear something would be lost in amalgamating disparate ideas, each of which would aim at a particular flavor and might be diluted in the mixing.

Patrick Zoch
Cowle Keep is lovely. My compliments. It definitely invokes the elegance of DysonLogos, though once you pointed it out, I may agree that the hash marks make things look a bit too busy. Perhaps only for a map as constrained as this particular keep. I bet the hash-marks would work fine on other maps with more open concepts. I love a good map but don't have any hand-drawing talent. I've had great fun with some cartography software over the years, though.

Heath Row (E&E)
I agree that the larger D&D books are likely not great entry points for many gamers. I'm surprised they've not adopted the practice of other systems that have - as you mention - shortened player's guides that are perhaps no more than 20-30 pages, and are designed to get people ready and playing as quickly as possible. A lesson to be learned for any aspiring system designer, I'm sure.

Joshua Kronengold
I've reconsidered contributing to Lisa's one-off zine, thank you, though I'm unsure as I write this if I've missed any deadlines. I'll find out in the coming days.

The sales news on D&D's 2024 edition was new to me, though pleasantly so. I don't always think Wizards of the Coast has stewarded the game well, but I also want to continue to see it thrive. I've heard the "it didn't do well" narrative from enough sources that I'm surprised this is the first I'm hearing a refutation. Something about a juicy lie traveling faster than the more boring truth, I'm sure, particularly in online circles. In any case, we're moving ahead with the new semi-edition in my group.

Lisa Padol
Our group has danced around trying *Blades in the Dark*. I may float it as a possibility for my skullduggery campaign pitch to see if sentiment has shifted enough to give it a go. Finding interest for non-D&D games in our group isn't hard; the hard part is getting everyone to agree on the *same* system. :-)

Brian Christopher Misiaszek
Delighted that you explored my website! Yes, if you sit me at a computer for any length of time and I don't have pressing matters to attend to, I will spontaneously begin writing about games and gaming topics. It's cathartic and enjoyable for me. I have articles scheduled out for several months (possibly over a year), and many others written but not laid out in the site's back-end yet, so it's effort that's (usually) easy to keep up with.

Jim Vassilakos
Re: meeting Hemingway in a dream: I've no immediate intention of exploring that particular moment further creatively, though I did enjoy the fact that I remembered it so vividly. There was a period of perhaps 10 minutes as I was conscious of being awake but not fully in the realm of conscious awareness, where it seemed real.

Hemingway, despite his well-documented flaws, is a fascinating figure to me, and he was of course a fine writer. My favorite of his is *In Our Time*, a collection of short stories set in the shadow of WWI. My hot take on Hemingway is that while his novels are far from bad, he's a better short story writer than novelist.

Re: *The Book of Disquiet*, its existence is indeed somewhat miraculous. Given some of his musings in the book on the nobility of failure and unfulfilled dreams, I wonder if there wasn't part of him that knew he would never actually finish and publish it, and took some bizarre pride in that fact. This may be a stretch, but I've also adopted it as a sort of head-canon as I read it, which lends it an odd air of triumph.

I don't find its passages uniformly brilliant (it's not uniformly *anything*, of course!), but it's one of the books I've returned to most in my life after discovering it. I have a habit of marking lines, quotes or sections of books that I'd love to revisit at some later date. *Disquiet* bears as many of these marks as any other book I've read in my life, and more than several combined in most cases.

IgTheme: Playing Style and What I Look For
As a GM, I have found myself incapable of running purchased adventures anywhere near as-written. This is perhaps the norm for some, but within my group we have other GMs who need that structure. I chafe within it, and I'm on record as saying that homebrew campaigns are FAR easier for me to run. Less to remember and keep coherent, since the world is more intuitive, having built it in my mind.

Setting is different, and I prefer vibrant, established settings that spur my imagination and give me a lot of potential hooks to adapt into my games. I don't want to

have to create settings wholecloth. A good setting book can be tantamount to multiple adventure books for me.

Hard to pinpoint the types of adventures that do this best, of course; it's one of those "you know it when you see it" sort of things. *Ghosts of Saltmarsh* does this well in 5e. It's a nautical sandbox with no true overarching story, just smaller story arcs, one-shots, locations, encounter types and ideas that you can mix and match into a seafaring campaign of your own. Good stuff.

As a player, I want opportunities for creative choice either on a campaign level or on a tactical level. This generally means that we have a problem (or multiple problems) and a set of tools, but there's nothing like a "right" way to do it according to the adventure. On a tactical level, it could be something like infiltrating a fortified camp. But don't give me Options A, B and C. Give me a few tools and a rough schematic of the place and let me work up and execute a plan myself (in conjunction with my group, of course).

I prefer running games to playing in them, and generally when I play, I focus on roleplay elements more so than mechanical optimization or commanding my share of the agency in the party. I'm along for the ride and will compliment the proceedings. I find roleplaying a single character believably across multiple sessions harder than bringing numerous NPCs to life for briefer periods.

I do voices. I will shed some modesty in saying that my work to improve in this area across several years has paid off, and I'm proud of the vocal nuance I can bring to the characters I bring to life.

Conversations With Lucifer (#2)

Borrowed from a haphazard document I keep of unrelated thoughts, fragments of inspiration, and snippets of semi-artful construction.

___

"Vanity is the base, for we all cling to the self," he went on, as though answering a question I hadn't asked.

"Even you?"
"Even so. None more so than me. For who would place themselves on such a throne after witnessing God itself if not for unconscionable vanity."

"Then you admit your sin, and your flaw?"
"Of course. I am as I was created. Why deny that? Only in fully embracing that sin do I most mock the God who created me thus."

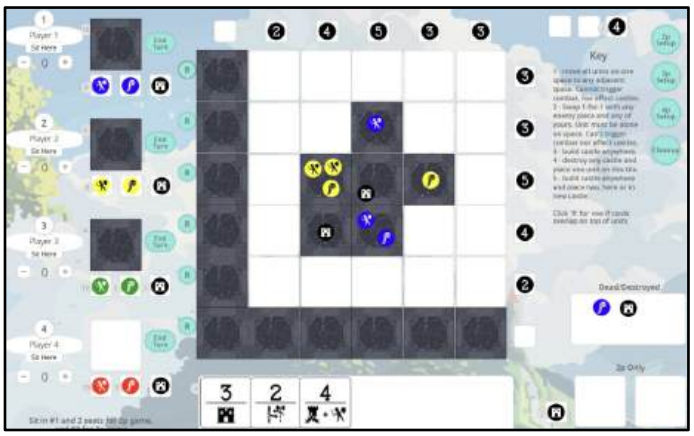
"Abdicate another throne then," I contended. "Abdicate your vanity, your very sense of self."

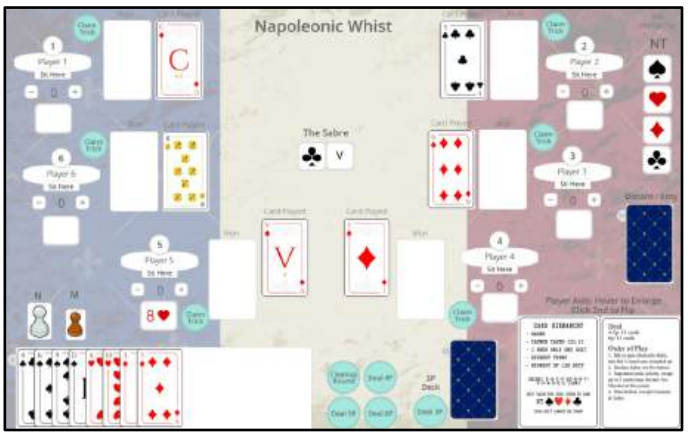
"What, like the Buddha?"
"If you like."
"Only Man has that privilege. I am eternal like my creator. The Buddha returned to that great changing of enlightenment, of the universe itself, when he sloughed off his ephemeral self. That which Is - which is to say, one who is a fact as constant as the universe is inconstant - must remain."

"Is God too incapable of this?"
Lucifer laughed, "And next, can He make a boulder so large He can't lift it, I suppose?"

A silence. "You are reaching the limits of your capacity for understanding. To walk further is to consort with contradictions."

Screenshots of a couple digital prototypes of my game designs. On the left, a grid-battler for 2-4 players that's in early development. Working Title: *Castle Wars*. On the right, a trick-taking card game in late development that takes chief inspiration from old-world games such as French Tarot and others from the 1400s-1800s, and thematically linked to the Malet Coup of 1812 against then-Emperor Napoleon. Working Title: *Napoleonic Whist*.





Traveller Play-By-Email

Plankwell Campaign, Ch 48: The Lawyer and the Lady

GMing: Jim Vassilakos & Timothy Collinson, Playing Capt. Plankwell: Conrad Rader

The character of Capt. Plankwell was conceived by Phil Pugliese

Faulk's office was high up in one of Silver City's towers, at least as evidenced by the view from his office window. The turboporters had disgorged us, one at a time, on the very floor of the building in which it was located, all without giving any indication of which building we were in or even which floor we were going to. Hence, the view came as a mild surprise, but then I remembered the thin man of middling height standing before me was a high-end lawyer, a specialist in High Justice, no less. He had gaunt features and a beard that was more white than gray, but his eyes were his most notable feature, dark and penetrating, like a predator sizing up potential prey.

Bilem Faulk

"Let's start by you telling me what happened," he said once we'd gone through the perfunctory introductions, sat down, and been offered drinks by his autoserver.[1]

"To make a complicated story simple, I was accosted by Heron security," I said, "ostensibly over an incorrect entry visa. Captain Masa, the Public Relations Coordinator at Plankwell Naval Base, attempted to intervene on my behalf, and when these security agents resorted to force whilst ignoring our comments, I called in my own forces and laid a temporary interdiction over the area. I admit there was an inconsistency in my visa approval, but I submit that the response was an order of magnitude greater than it needed to be, and, let me be clear, attempts to apply force to active duty naval officers are *not* tolerated. Especially when it is agents of the local government applying the force. I have commended my Marines on their restraint."

Faulk looked at me, perhaps waiting to see if I'd go on. Meanwhile, Lt. Sidara was thinking about their prior conversation and how he'd told her that at least during peacetime, the Navy only had free rein within the naval base and starports, and in the case of the latter, we still had to deal with the Starport Authority, although they, at least, were an Imperial institution. Faulk didn't bother to repeat any of this to me, however, and his brain, unlike Sidara's, wasn't bleeding stray thoughts into the ether. Instead, he simply asked a question.

"Now that it's all over, what do you want?"

I felt a certain heaviness in the pit of my stomach. What *did* I want?

I'd spent so much time implementing and doing whatever the Navy wanted, it sometimes took me by surprise that I had needs that didn't always align. But here was a chance to try to make some positive change so some future spacer wouldn't get roughed up by power hungry locals. I could even exact some personal revenge, but I pushed that thought to the side. If my experiences with Maakhiriin were anything to go by, I preferred revenge through living well.

"What I would like is an investigation into policing practices as relates to the Navy," I finally answered.

"A local investigation or an Imperial one?"

Before I could decide, Sidara asked, "What would you recommend?"

"Well, it would be fun to attack the bastards from both sides," Faulk said. "The problem we'll run into is the JIPD will probably back the HPSS."

"JIPD?" Sidara asked. She began to scroll through her notes.

"The Justice, Incarceration, and Policing Division," Faulk replied, "a.k.a. the keepers of order. How long do you plan to be here?"

"It depends on how long it takes to finish repairs," I said.

Faulk nodded. "I'll petition them and the County Court for expedited hearings."

"We've already got an Expedited Adjudication Request," Sidara said.

"Signed by?"

"The Countess's Chief of Staff, I believe."

"Really? How did you manage that?"

Sidara looked at me, causing Faulk to do likewise.

1 https://wiki.travellerrpg.com/Autoserver

"I saved the Countess some face by drawing down the interdiction in exchange for the Expedited Adjudication Request, this after she ignored my attempts to contact her directly."

"Interesting," Faulk said. "Flick me a copy of that request. Actually, when they're signed by the palace, we call them orders."

"It says request," Sidara said.

"But it's from the palace, which sort of makes it an order."

She glanced toward me, wide-eyed. As acting protocol officer, that was something she should have known, and it rather confirmed my initial assessment of the palace invitation.

"It'll definitely help us cut through the bureaucracy," Faulk continued. "I'll schedule a pair of hearings, and we'll get this show on the road. With any luck, we'll get the County Court to order the MoJ[2] to open an investigation. Once that happens, the JIPD will be compelled to actually do their job."

"What about this Directorate for Ethical Reform in Policing?" Sidara asked, looking at her notes.

"They're a Citizens Action Committee that got too big for its britches," Faulk said with a smirk. "Ever since they were elevated to the status of a directorate, they've been pushing for blindness in justice."

"Blindness in justice?" Sidara asked.

"Anti-profiling. But that's fine. We can talk to them, and with this EAR, they'll have no choice but to wedge us into their schedule."

I groaned inwardly, the heaviness in my stomach tightening into a knot.

"What I'm worried about," I said, "is that at the end of all this, I'll get an official apology, meaning a false one, and someone will make a notation in some secret file flagging me for additional screening every time I come into contact with local law enforcement."

Faulk stared at me momentarily, his expression perfectly blank.

"Are you planning on retiring here?" he finally asked.

"No."

He shrugged. What he was saying, albeit tacitly, was that it didn't matter if Jewell's labyrinthine bureaucracy decided to hold a grudge. I wasn't going to be here long enough to let it bother me. And although that was certainly true, I was going to be here for however long it took General Products to replace our Exploration Pod.

"Something else may be going on," I said, leaning in, "something that leaves me with a bad taste in my mouth. I can't prove anything, but there have been enough random events connected to me and my crew to give me suspicions. My job involves keeping the Imperium safe. The Imperium has seen fit to give me the tools to do that job decisively. The interdiction I ordered? It could have been a lot worse if one of us had died."

Faulk raised an eyebrow but said nothing.

"We are currently processing all the Intel data we scooped while we were in control," I continued, "and we are looking for differences in the stories we are being told. What are the penalties for lying during court proceedings here?"

"In the Magisterial Court for the County of Jewell, perjury carries a five year sentence, but in the Jewellian courts, it's seven."

I leaned back again. He was nominally my representative to both.

"We are in a situation of overlapping jurisdictions, and decisions made in one sphere are likely to precipitate actions in another."

"I get it," he said, nodding. "This is political. Caution is justified, prudence an asset. But there's something you need to understand. Legal contests at this level are like street fights, and if we mean to win, we can't pull our punches. It's go for the throat or walk away."

Walk away. Now there's something I hadn't considered. But I nodded. Faulk was using language I understood.

"What I want, Mr. Faulk, is to finish repairing my ship and continue my mission with the least amount of official interaction I can get away with."

"My understanding is you're scheduled to appear at the Imperial Palace today."

"Yes." I nodded.

He arched an eyebrow, probably amused at my role as the reluctant birthday boy.

"When you get in there," he said, "somebody on the Countess's staff will ask for your side of the story, but what they'll really want to know is how angry you are and how serious you are about getting even. If you tell them what you just told me, they'll make a bunch of promises that will most likely be forgotten the moment you leave. Once you're gone, this whole incident will be swept under the rug. The HPSS will keep doing whatever they want, and nothing will change.

"If you want things to change," he continued, "we have to get under their skin. But you need to be careful what you say, because if the palace decides it's more expedient to throw you under the bus than go to war with the HPSS, that's what they'll do. You need to avoid saying anything they might be able to turn against you. So what you do is you tell them you hired me and will be speaking through me. Tell 'em Bili's got your back. Then they'll stop bothering you, and they'll start bothering me, and when they do, I'll get them to fall in line, because as I said, this whole thing is probably going to end up local versus Imperial, and once that happens, they really have no other choice. No matter what they say to you now, they *will*

2 https://wiki.travellerrpg.com/Ministry_of_Justice

ultimately fall in line. But you have to let me do the talking."

I took this in and really studied the man before me. Command involved assigning the best person to the job and letting them get it done.

"Understood. May I show them how mad I am? Or would you prefer Captain Ironface?"

"Ironface," he replied. "The fact that you hired me will speak for itself."

"Just so you know, I have some personal history with someone on the Countess's staff."

"Oh?"

"An old shipmate, Guri Maakhiriin, now of the Subsector Navy."

"An old friend?"

"Quite the opposite. If I were them, that's who I'd assign… to see if he can get a rise out of me. It's what they've been doing so far, either that or he's been freelancing for his own reasons."

"What's the beef about?"

"He thinks I ruined his career."

"And he's a member of the palace staff?"

"Naval Liaison."

"Naval Liaison to an Imperial Countess. Doesn't exactly qualify as a ruined career. What was he expecting? That he'd be Grand Admiral?"

I couldn't help but grin.

"For some people, their anger doesn't need to make sense. But, to be fair, he was discharged from the Imperial Navy and ended up relegated to a colonial fleet, which I can well imagine feels like a slap to the face."

"I'm glad you warned me about this guy. Be very careful what you say to him or in his presence."

I nodded. "There's one more thing. I'll be perfectly frank. If worse comes to worst, we can make a deal, and I can accept the surface platitudes and be on my way. Nonetheless, I can't help but think someone is trying to make some changes, and they're using me as a lever. Those most affected should have an opportunity to fight back, so maybe we should talk to these *ethical reform* people. I'm probably not the sort of victim they're used to, but maybe we can find some common interest."

"I suppose it's worth a shot," he said.

"Please keep Lt. Sidara apprised of any further requirements. I will be happy to make myself available at your discretion. If there's nothing further, I believe we have a summons — sorry, invitation — to accept."

Sidara's brain seemed to go offline for a moment, but then it chirped back up with *You Idiot! How could you not know it was a summons!? Because it said invitation. How was I supposed to know it was being coy? Because you're the acting Protocol Officer!*

«Schizo,» Josefeen observed. *«This is what happens when people take their jobs too seriously.»*

Indeed, Sidara was flushed and beginning to sweat, so much so I could feel the tingling heat in her face as we took turns shaking Mr. Faulk's hand. Then we headed back to the turboporter, Sidara still scolding herself for the error.

«Poor woman. You should really give her some shore leave. By the way, the reason you couldn't read any thoughts from the lawyer was because of his skullcap.» A subdermal psi-shield[3], she meant. The operation was somewhat dangerous, as it involved a partial skull transplant. Nonetheless, for reasonably wealthy individuals with good reasons for keeping their thoughts private, skullcaps were becoming something of a fashion, albeit an invisible one.

«Interesting.» I hadn't tried probing Faulk's mind and wondered what might have happened if I had. Did subdermal psi-shields include sensors that let the user know they were being probed? *«Any wisdom there?»* I asked, assuming Josefeen was listening in on my every thought.

«Huh?»

Apparently, I was mistaken, and then it hit me. Though she'd pumped me with a second shot of the psi-enhancer, we hadn't reestablished our durable psychic link. I really didn't want to kiss her again and wondered if we could make the connection with really intense thoughts.

«If you were properly trained, that would be an option,» she answered, proving she could still get in my head. Indeed, as we approached the single turboporter terminal, I sensed her tentacle skimming my surface thoughts. *«And what's this about you not wanting to kiss me? Do you find me revolting, Gus?»*

«Of course, not. Don't be silly. It's the constant having to counter the impression that I can't keep my hands off of you, because we always seem to be in public places when we need to reestablish the connection. Or is this part of the plan to harden me?»

«Nice verb choice.»

I could sense her browsing through my memories, trying to figure out what sort of things hardened me.

«Stop probing me! I'll find a private moment in the Palace to reestablish the connection.»

---

3 I couldn't find anything in the Traveller literature about subdermal psionic shields, so I just made it up that they existed, thinking that since the Mongoose edition shows psi-shields arriving at TL-12, it was reasonable to assume subderms would become available a few tech levels after that. During a TML discussion on this topic (see https://www.simplelists.com/tml/msg/25650551/), Rupert Boleyn pointed out that TNE's (Traveller: The New Era's) *Fire, Fusion, & Steel* shows cybernetic psionic shields coming available at TL-13, and they apparently go slick (subdermal) at TL-14 (see the Cyber Head Options table on page 82). Different versions of Traveller treat psi-shields somewhat differently, but for this campaign I'm assuming they need electricity to operate.

I looked over to Lt. Sidara, sensing there was something she wanted to say to me privately, something about the meeting we'd just had. Oh, of course. She wanted to apologize for her mistake. I gently placed a hand on her arm and motioned for Josefeen to take the first capsule, which she did. Sidara then turned to me during the brief interlude between when the turboporter door closed and would reopen.

He doesn't want the crew to salute him, she was thinking. *How do you think he's going to feel about having to listen to an awkward apology?*

"Lieutenant," I said, wishing she'd get on with it.

"Sir?"

I sighed. "I am sure you are capable in your role as legal liaison. But as acting protocol officer, you are taking on a bigger burden. Where are you from?"

"Mongo, sir."

Which was only two parsecs away. It made her ignorance with respect to matters of court all the more glaring.

"Doesn't matter really," I said. "Protocol is a big area, and you never know when you are going to run into people who have more knowledge than you. Do not let yourself get caught up in my battles too much. I need you to safekeep the Navy's reputation."

"I understand, sir, and I promise I'll do better."

I smiled. "You're doing fine. Keep up the good work. And remember, you could have it worse, like Lt. Abbonette. She has to agree with me," I said, pretty sure I was keeping a straight face. "You get to offer contrary suggestions, at least." I gestured to the waiting capsule. "Off you go."

"Aye aye, sir. And thank you, sir."

She entered her capsule, and soon an empty one took its place.

"State destination," a computer-generated voice said as I entered.

"Imperial Palace."

My capsule left the building and picked up speed, its inertial compensators masking the acceleration, although as the capsule turned sideways, so did gravity, but this too was mostly suppressed, and, in any case, there were handholds, and by now I was more or less used to it. Outside the narrow window, the city sped by like a flowing mosaic, white floodlight reflecting from seemingly countless angles, Silver City starkly luminous against the jet black sky.

It was a mixed bag, being able to see the inner thoughts of my crew. It certainly made me seem more effective in delivering needed reassurances or stinging points of correction, both of which I hoped might begin the legend of the omniscient Captain Plankwell. On the other hand, I had actionable intelligence that I could not act on without revealing the source, which would create bigger complications than I was prepared to deal with.

The capsule came to an abrupt halt, and as the doors slid open, I could see I was back in the palace's security foyer. As expected, Josefeen and Lt. Sidara had arrived ahead of me, but who they were introducing themselves to was surprising. It was none other than Lady Alise and her minder, Squiress Syeda Durami, the latter now free from her head-bubble.[4]

"Hello again." The Squiress smiled. "I'm cured." She curtsied as I approached, using the form that denoted respect to the Imperial Military. Alise, of course, couldn't follow suit, for she was a lady and could only curtsy a flag officer, but she nodded her head slightly, no doubt awaiting my bow.

I took a few steps forward and bowed to Alise, not the best bow I'd ever done given the stiffness of my bulletproof vest, but I managed to include Durami by dint of shifting my direction several degrees off-center from Alise. It was in the form of respect to Imperial nobility, but I made it a little quick, short of what would be normal at a first meeting but not so short as to infer familiarity. Finally, I flourished it with a slight click of my heels, indicating loyal service.

"My ladies, a pleasure to once again be in your company."

"It is our pleasure to be attended once again by the gallant Captain," the Squiress said.

Lt. Sidara, for her part, was in awe as Alise was the reigning noble of Mongo, her homeworld. Millions of people lived there, and very few of them ever got to meet Alise, much less her mother, the Countess of Jewell. Needless to say, Sidara was worried she'd do something stupid, like bowing too long or too short or not clicking her heels together with just the right amount of force, so she endeavored to bow exactly as I had, and she mimicked me so well that she came up too quick, given that this was her first time meeting these two noblewomen.

---

4 To give you an idea of how much I let the dice determine the course of events, I rolled a d6 to determine who'd be there to greet Gus and his assistants. If I'd rolled 1-2, it would have been Gus's old nemesis, Guri Maakhiriin, who, being the Countess's Naval Liaison, really should have been the person greeting him. But, it stands to reason one of the palace psions might have noticed Guri's inexplicable anger toward Gus, and so he might have been given some time off. If I'd rolled 3-4, it would have been Agidda, who, although himself being a guest in the palace, might have been chosen to lead Gus into Seventeas, since they'd worked together previously. However, I rolled a 6, and on a 5-6, I'd decided, the Squiress would want to thank Gus for filling in for her at the Commerce Committee. Also, she has certain talents which the Countess might want to utilize to discern Captain Plankwell's intent with respect to his recent tasing and subsequent interdiction. And because I rolled a 6, I rolled again to determine if Lady Alise would be present as well, and I rolled another 6, so yes, Alise is there to observe and, of course, to learn.

Yes! she thought to herself. *I did it! Wait. Why's everyone looking at me?*

Aside from the bow being too brief for an initial audience, there were other, even more glaring problems, and I made a mental note to have Sidara review the male/female and alternate gender signifiers of courtly bows. In short, she'd bowed as a man rather than a woman, and in some circles that was considered a very forward suggestion.

"To what do I owe the honor of your greeting?" I asked.

"I want to thank you for your assistance with the Lady Mongo," Durami said, glancing briefly at Alise, but then she returned her gaze to me as I pulled my shoulders into a parade rest, my uniform tight across my armored chest. No less than five guards and a beefy-looking robot stood nearby, and I was curious to see if there was anyone behind them, but it would have been rude to shift my attention while the Squiress was looking upon me so intently, so I stretched my mind out instead and discovered a psychic tentacle poking its way in. "I want to thank you by warning you," Durami continued. "The two HPSS contractors who… ah… acted so ungentlemanly toward you…, they're here."

I cocked my head to the side. "Are they now? I suppose that will be of interest to my counsel, Bili Faulk. Lt. Sidara, please send an update to Mr. Faulk."

"Aye aye, sir."

I kept my face expressionless, as Faulk had instructed, but I opened up my psyche to 'hear' whatever might get leaked as a consequence of that declaration. Almost instantly, I could sense there was something in Durami's mind about Faulk, a memory of him getting snarky, effectively gloating after a victory, and it made me think of Kaz and her brief conversation, in committee, with the Countess. They were both situations of over-familiarity but with the crucial difference that Faulk was able to get away with it, whereas Kaz, not so much.

«What do you think you're doing?» Josefeen's voice floated across my mind but as if spoken in another direction.

«Who are you?» Durami's voice telepathically replied, but then she said, "Faulk? You hired Bili Faulk?" Two conversations at once. She'd glanced at Josefeen for the first part, but I still heard it, and I could even hear Josefeen's reply: *«Naval Intelligence. You will cease and desist immediately. Captain Plankwell's mind is off-limits.»*

I snapped the mental drapes shut and did my best to retain the *ironface* I'd bragged to Faulk about.

"Please, let us not keep the Countess waiting," I said, ignoring Durami's question, which was more exclamatory than interrogative anyway. Every time I thought I had a handle on a situation, I was reminded I was like a tiger cub wandering around cluelessly, swatting at adults, and it was only their forbearance that kept me from feeling the claws.

I extended my arm to Alise. "My lady, if I may have the honor of escorting you?"

My request was not so bold as it might have seemed, having acted as escort for her in the recent past. It was a more normative offer, indicating, I hoped, that I was open to hearing whatever the Countess might propose but also that I would be the one making the decisions.

Alise, her eyebrows rising slightly, glanced to her minder, the Squiress, who nodded without glancing back. She then stepped forward, placing her hand in mine, her form *en ludicra*, as one might take into a birthday party, which, of course, reminded me this *was* my birthday. Perhaps it was a tacit warning that a birthday party was about to commence?

Of course, I didn't know which way to go, but she motioned with her chin toward a wide hall, and so we walked hand-in-hand, the thoughts I'd been keeping locked down stirring within me. I ached to just let loose, like I had with Masa. Somehow, I'd gotten him on my side, and without even trying. But my command sense locked down even harder. The only thing worse than someone running around with a hot fusion gun was the one who did not understand the capabilities of the weapon, and right now, that was me.

As we walked through the wide corridor of "living" statues, I wondered if maybe I should have skipped the pep talk with Lt. Sidara and just sent her ahead of us, either that or crowded into the first capsule with Josefeen, despite what Sidara might think. My brain painted the imagined scene quite vividly, until Alise squeezed my hand just enough to get my attention.

"If you would trust me," she whispered, leaning in, "you might well find a friend. Or am I too young for that also?"

"I don't mistrust you." Ever-conscious of being watched, I turned my head slightly towards her. "And I am always interested in new friends."

Alise violently shook her head, causing her hair, which had been combed back, to suddenly drape her face. Then, using the fingers of her free hand, she combed it back to where it more or less belonged and finally looked at me with raised eyebrows.

I returned the look, slightly perplexed. Then the credit dropped, and I released the hold on my mental drapes.

«Go ahead,» I telepathically sent.

I adjusted the turn of my arm to something more suitable to old friends than party guests, bringing her in closer. It was a hell of a leap of faith, but *if* it gave me an in, I was willing to take it. I'd thought Durami was the one being cautioned by Josafeen. That may have been, but Alise was likely in possession of even more information than her minder, given her close relationship with the Countess. I just hoped she wasn't about to force a durable psionic connection on me.

"You must be very careful with whom you choose to telepathically conjoin," Sy (aka Squiress Syeda Durami) had told her at some point in the past. "A *psimergence* is not a trifling undertaking. The participants are each flooded with each other's knowledge and perspectives. When forged properly, its durability is such that it is difficult and painful to rescind. Whoever you do this with must be someone of whom your mother approves."

Mother is a Manipulator, I could sense Alise thinking.

The Countess was a Manipulator?

"The most powerful nobles are often Manipulators," Sy had told her. "Although rare, even among telepaths, the talent runs through the bloodlines of the oldest and most powerful of the noble lineages, including yours."[5]

So the Countess was a Manipulator, as was I. At least, that's what Josefeen had told me. But what did it mean precisely? I recalled the previous night, and how I'd been yanking Reggie's memories out by their roots, severing from his mind any recollection of psi orbs and especially of the one Josefeen carried in our diplomatic pouch.

Alise twisted her neck back as far as it would stretch and caught a brief glimpse of the pouch, essentially a small briefcase, before returning her gaze to mine. It was only then I realized our eyes had been locked, and during that long moment I couldn't even feel my feet against the polished floor despite the fact we'd continued walking, and in a straight line, no less, as though the parts of our brains associated with complex ideas and abstract thought had slipped away from those responsible for agility and motor control.

«You're hopped up pretty well. I hope you're planning to share.»

"Happy birthday!" a chorus of voices cried out as we entered the tea room. There were even more people than before. The Countess, of course, sat at the head of the table, the two closest seats to her right unoccupied and therefore obviously reserved for myself and her daughter. At the opposite end of the table sat Canon Forklinbrass! He stared at me, his gaze narrowing, and Admiral Karneticky sat beside him, his lips forcefully pressed into a smile. Agidda was also present, as was Amika, accompanied once again by General Dakhir, and even Bim Marshall, my Scout Liaison, was there. He sat between a bushy-bearded man in an IISS uniform and a young blonde dressed in business attire, both of whom seemed vaguely familiar. Meanwhile, the table overflowed with decanters containing teas and juices as well as platters with cakes and breads and cheeses and jams, and there were fresh fruit and prunes and even dried cave fungus and poppers, a veritable feast.[6]

5 See https://www.simplelists.com/tml/msg/25783758/

6 After I posted this update, Conrad wrote, "…Holeee shit!!! This is like the Dr. Who episode where they discover that the British Royal Family are probably werewolves.… My film critic friend often complains about the stakes in movies not being high enough to engage the viewer more viscerally, and you my friend just kicked the stakes in this story/game into the stratosphere… the revelation that old noble families are psionic, the implications for what that actually means for Gus, and coming into a party room with all of the live threads feels like Rosemary's Baby, the Red Wedding, and Al Capone's baseball bat scene rolled into one, and all I got on my side is a questionable IN agent and a rebellious noble girl. Gonna need some time to let this sink in. All of my paranoid senses just went into overdrive. Is it like a Cold War East Berlin situation with the Zhodani and the Frontier Imperials, who is training everyone (are there Zho rebels seeking political asylum?), and it explains a LOT about how nobles remain in power, and very similar to current day power and information manipulations. Have I been a naif moving through enemies I thought of as friends, and are my actual friends (who I may have been considering enemies) trying to extricate me? Is the campaign of sabotage and rebellion really the aftereffects of the clampdown on the rebels? This is not the first time you did this to me, and it is a big reason I keep playing this game. Thanks for a huge pick me up!!" While I was, of course, pleased to receive such high praise, I also thought to myself that perhaps I'd revealed too much too soon. Granted, Gus had just gotten an injection of the psi-enhancer, and the rolls I made seemed to justify my giving a little bit extra beyond mere surface thoughts, but absent a hit from the psionic orb, my update probably went a bit too far. Nonetheless, he obviously enjoyed it.

Download the consolidated Plankwell write-up: https://jimvassilakos.com/dos-programs/plank.html

Past A&E & E&A zines are at: https://mega.nz/folder/hGYliCKK#a0fr1dDhy3no6Ey5xNPukQ

Jim's Comments on E&A #2:

Sanity in Call of Cthulhu:

John Redden (E&A #2, pg. 9): "Saturday we start with 4 players each having 2 characters, with only the first one in play. The second is there if the first one dies or goes insane."

This is something I never understood about CoC, how seeing something that shouldn't exist causes characters to go bonkers. I get that it's a trope of the genre, but it still seems absurd. Same with reading occult literature driving people nuts. My nearest point of reference is reading something so badly written it triggers a headache.

Freedom in a neurologically-enhanced future:

Brian Rogers (E&A #2, pg. 21): "The core premise is what if in the future humanity could access our neural software so that we can make ourselves not-assholes. The villains are people who say 'but am I really human

if I, personally, don't have the opportunity to be an asshole to people?'"

It's an important question, but I can imagine a time when the people who ask it would be considered villainous. Then again, as we have seen in our own time, the opposite sides of political/moral debates often consider each other to be villains, so this shouldn't come as a great surprise. This reminds me of my N-bots idea, which I outlined in A&E #536.

Playing Evil:

Patrick Riley (E&A #2, pg. 23): "After he died, the wizard's daughter, Isadora, made it impossible for her to stay."

Why not just tell Millie her services are no longer required? And why burn one of her late father's spellbooks just because Millie was reading it? Did Isadora's actions ever make sense to Millie or her player? I'm somewhat opposed to playing characters demonstrably evil sans some sort of internal justification or demonic possession. Usually, people who behave badly have some sort of internal logic making themselves out to be the hero.

Riskiness of Villainy:

Gabriel Roark (E&A #2, pg. 33): "…the survival rate of my villains of late is perilously low!"

This reminds me of a campaign I ran where when it came time for the big showdown battle against the BBG (a high-level wizard) and his minions, I ended up rolling catastrophic spell failure, and he blew himself up.[7] Needless to say, it turned into a rout. The players were quite pleased with this turn of events, but for me it was a bit of a let down. Villains who die too soon are, IMHO, pretty much useless.

Creating campaign write-ups through PBEMing:

Myles Corcoran (E&A #2, pg. 38): "I checked the link to the back numbers of the Plankwell Campaign and found a pdf just shy of 300 pages. Damn, you're dedicated."

Actually, it's pretty easy to generate pages in a single-player PBEM, or in any sort of PBEM for that matter. I'm writing a series of articles about the advantages and process of this type of PBEMing in George's APA.[8]

Silly PCs:

Attronarch (E&A #2, pg. 40): "Cadmias the Wise, vizier of the Imrael family, was advocating against getting involved with the adventurers, for he had seen firsthand how incompetent they are. 'One of them willfully took a blade named Doomed! And now he is dead!'"

Just for the record, this exchange is what prompted December's IgTheme.

Ecos da fantasia:

Pedro & Maira (E&A #2, pg. 49): "It's safe to say that *Ecos da fantasia* was a successful publication."

Is there going to be an English version?

God of Cowardice:

George Phillies (E&A #2, pg. 53): "Brother Gowophilus is a human cleric of Gow All-Fleeing, He who hides in his Invincible Fortress Beyond the Skies. He worries that he is becoming a heretic, because he is doing something that requires courage, while his faith's chief virtue is cowardice."

Nice. Although not terribly realistic, I enjoy these sorts of absurdities. It might be fun to create a whole pantheon around vices instead of virtues.

Writers Circle:

Mark Nemeth (E&A #2, pg. 65): "What would a writers' circle consist of?"

As a writer in need of comments:

Step 1: Write something. Note, because this is a draft version intended for corrections and comments, it's probably best to use standard formatting guidelines for manuscripts: a 12-point font, one-inch margins, and double-spacing. Also, .docx format is the current standard, so it's best to convert the document to that if you're not already using it.

Step 2: Upload the .docx version of the document to Google Drive[9]. Note, if you don't already have a Google Account, you'll probably need to create one, but fear not. They're free. The only catch I'm aware of is Google will probably use everything you upload to train their AI, but just think of this as a form of immortality. It'll help take the sting away during the robot rebellion.

Step 3: Go to the icon for the file you just uploaded to your Google Drive and open it as a Google Document (right-click, "Open with", "Google Docs").

Step 4: Get a link to share what you've written (left-click on "File", "Share", "Share with others", change "Restricted" to "Anyone with the link", change Role=Viewer to Role=Commenter, and click the "Copy link" button. This will copy the link to your buffer. You can now paste it into a document or email using Ctrl-V.

7 See footnote #8 of my article, *Making Magic More Interesting (and Dangerous)*, in A&E #508.

8 See https://tnfff.org/a-gentle-stroll/

9 https://workspace.google.com/products/drive/

Step 5: Email an announcement telling people in the circle about the file you uploaded and giving a deadline for comments. Make sure to include the link you copied to your buffer during the previous step.

Step 6: Come back after the deadline and take a look to see what people said.

Step 7 (optional): If you'd like to schedule a voice-chat so you can talk to people about their comments, you can post a link to some video conference room, or you can use the voice-channel in E&A Discord server, but because of the differences in everyone's time zones and schedules, it's much less problematic to get the commentary you need asynchronously. Also, bear in mind it's considered proper etiquette in writers' circles to accept commentary without rebuttal. In other words, use what resonates and discard the rest, but don't argue with people, as the commentary one receives should be considered a gift, and even if you initially disagree with it, upon later reflection it may spark some useful ideas. At least, that's been my experience.

As somebody giving comments:

Step 1: Monitor the writers' circle mailing list for announcements about new files in need of editing.

Step 2: Click the file link contained within the announcement.

Step 3: Make sure you're in "Suggesting Mode" (the word "Suggesting" should appear near the upper-right corner of the document. If you see "Editing" instead, change it to "Suggesting" using the drop-down menu).

Step 4: Make corrections to the text as if you were editing a normal document on your computer. Instead of your edits becoming permanent, they'll show up along the righthand side of the page as suggestions for the author to either accept or reject. You can also make comments (highlight some text want you want to comment on, right click it, and then select "Comment", and when you finish writing your comment, make sure to hit the "Comment" button so your comment gets posted along the righthand side of the page).

Step 5: When you're finished with your corrections and comments, simply close the browser window. Note, if you decide you want to make more comments, you can re-enter the document using the original link so long as the person who uploaded it hasn't removed it.

In any case, let me know if this sounds like something you'd be interested in trying.

28 Magazine:

Dylan Capel (E&A #2, pg. 68): "The Kickstarter edition of online wargaming magazine Collected 28 has come out and it is one of the most beautiful books I've ever seen."

Is this it or something else?: https://28-mag.com/

Character enhancements & complications:

Michael Cule (E&A #2, pg. 72): "I laid before the players five envelopes which had printed on the outside five tempting extra bonus things to enhance their character. (...) I warned them though: inside each envelope except one was a further complication for the character's life."

Nice idea. It makes me wonder if there should be a deck (or random table) of boons & banes for use in character generation, wherein the player can, at their option, select from among two or three random advantages but must also accept a random disadvantage to go with it. No doubt, someone has already created this.

Fantasy Coinage:

Pum (E&A #2, pg. 78): "…in my homebrew campaign, I use the old English system of Pounds, Shillings and Pennies for the purposes of flavour. I am just about old enough to remember 'old money', but not old enough to remember farthings and groats."

For my AD&D campaigns, I vaguely remember borrowing the names of a few of the coins from the Coinage Value Chart in *Arduin Grimoire, Vol 2*.

FTL in SFRPGs:

Jim Eckman (E&A #2, pg. 83): "How do you handle FTL travel? Keep on trucking like Star Trek or jump points, or jump paths? Or galactic trains and other oddities? Limiting the number of destinations can make the GM's job a bit easier. How have you handled this?"

There's an article you might like in The Guildsman #3[10], pages 9-21. As for myself, I wanted to steer clear of FTL[11], but it eventually came to my attention that the interstellar medium, as diffuse as it is, is still likely thick enough to prevent starships from moving through it at fast-STL speeds.[12] At least, the vessel would need some impenetrable shield powerful enough to deflect hydrogen atoms impacting it at relativistic velocities without heating up, and to make matters worse, there's also the risk of impacting larger objects. Even a grain of sand impacting at a relativistic comparative velocity would carry a whole lot of energy, and my guess is there are plenty of objects like that and many that are much larger, floating between the stars.

Goblin Quest:

Heath Row (E&A #2, pg. 88): "Establish without a doubt that we have the Right Chicken"

---

10 https://jimvassilakos.com/guildsman/guildsman03.pdf

11 See my zine in A&E #298, *298vas - Introduction to…*, at https://mega.nz/folder/hGYliCKK#a0fr1dDhy3no6Ey5xNPukQ

12 https://lists.simplelists.com/tml/msg/28044224/

Just out of curiosity, how did they establish without a doubt that they had the Chicken Who Made All This, and did it involve use of the chicken dictionary?

Monk with anger-management issues:

Mark A. Wilson (E&A #2, pg. 92): "She (in my mind the character is female) is a somewhat oblivious monk whose monastery kicked her out… (…) Knowing that she has anger issues, she's super into meditation and breathing, trying to use those things to quell her darker urges."

Great character concept. Mind if I steal it?

Linear Narrative vs. Sandbox:

Clark Timmins (E&A #2, pg. 95): "Both adventures place a heavy emphasis on setting up the action for the PCs, seeking buy-in from the players, and engaging the action within the narrative. Otherwise, they're simple dungeon crawlers. The adventures start with guards, lead on to some tricks and traps, present some tougher guards and then named NPCs, and end with treasure and the objectives. This is laid out in a somewhat linear format so that the very structure of the dungeon more-or-less enforces the flow of the narrative. Typical design based on the premise that meaning emerges from organization. Which has not been my experience in roleplaying. Instead, meaning emerges from play. I'm convinced that a series of random events or things in random order will provide meaning when played, because players – humans – so persistently seek pattern and meaning that when none is present it will be generated anyway. We're hard-wired to make sense of things. And make sense of things we do – even when the sense isn't really based on the thing."

Like you, I'm not a big fan of the linear narrative (railroad), and your assertion that "meaning emerges from play" is one with which I wholeheartedly agree. Granted, regardless of how the PCs end up at the dungeon, there has to be some rationale for them being there. Speaking personally, however, I've never liked these "it's a job" type of set-ups. And what you presented in the unexpurgated version was exactly that. "The PCs are asked by Stallanford's leaders to fix the problem…." Well, how did that happen? Don't they have a police force that can attend to this sort of thing?

I suppose there are plenty of campaigns where the PCs are famous heroes, and bards are no doubt singing their praises in taverns throughout the land. But in most of the campaigns I've run, the PCs tended to operate under the radar until they reached the point where they could start building castles of their own.

In addition, this idea of town leaders coming up to the PCs and asking them to do something reeks of a GM-directed narrative. Wouldn't it be better to dangle some red meat in front of the PCs in the form of rumors or a map? In my opinion, the group is always more invested and feels more positive about tasks they undertake on their own without any town leader coming out of the woodwork to hire them to do something.

Adventures that start as jobs for hire rob the players of the opportunity to exercise their own initiative, turning their characters into little more than miniatures to move around a battlemap, all to accomplish some GM-designated objective. Granted, this isn't always necessarily true. There's a whole genre of PI stories that start as a job and turn into something more. And when starting a new campaign, it's often a good idea to give the players some initial direction. But in my experience with RPGs, this sort of thing is done far too often, and so it's become one of my pet peeves.[13]

In any case, it seems to me that cutting up a published module, as you did, possibly isn't the best way to address this problem. I think that what you're trying to do is to simply create a sandbox adventure, using this cut-up method to describe what's in the various rooms. But dungeons also have to make a certain amount of sense. If you're doing it well, you sort of need to be able to explain how all the inhabitants get along (or not).

You also need to address the aforementioned issue of why the PCs are there in the first place. It might be useful to provide a list of possible reasons as well as a table of rumors (some true, others false), so individual GMs can decide for themselves how to introduce the dungeon into their own campaigns. At least, that's how I would approach it. I'd imagine there are various random tables one could employ to brainstorm ideas.

As for reusing content from professionally published modules, I'm not against it in principle, but I don't think such cut-ups can be publicly distributed without risking the potential of violating someone's copyright.

Evolution of Morality:

Joshua Kronengold (E&A #2, pg. 106): "In Dan's game (Neitherworld), he plays with alignment in that he'll have 'evil' NPCs explain how they have realized that acting in a 'good' method makes them more likely to, well, win and be able to cooperate...."

Dan may have stumbled upon the sociological force behind the psycho-evolution of morality. Under this conception, evil seems to equate with sociopathy. But I wonder how many sociopaths are out there who taught themselves to be good, at least most of the time, because

13 For my other pet peeves, see my IgTheme comments in A&E #578.

they saw doing so as being in their own long-term interests? Perhaps many of them even acquired the habits of being good while still being sociopaths at heart. Would they detect as good or evil?

Eternal Lies for Trail of Cthulhu:

Lisa Padol (E&A #2, pg. 112): "When I ran Eternal Lies, a Trail of Cthulhu campaign, the PCs were trying to figure out how to get into a villain's mansion. I handed them a map of the place, as they were able to get access to the blueprints of the building. It didn't show any secrets -- but it did show a balcony that ran between a couple of rooms on the upper floor, and one of the players spotted this at once. As far as I can tell, that was something the authors wouldn't have intended to be there, as it's an obvious weak point in what's meant to be a very, very hard place to sneak into, as in the PCs aren't supposed to be able to do this. And there is absolutely no mention of this balcony in the text. I'm very curious about what happened with the map, and what the authors actually intended."

Playtesting should have caught this. At one point, there was apparently an errata list and revision notes[14], but I don't know if they still exist.

The Fall of Machado in Cuba:

Brian Misiaszek (E&A #2, pg. 116): "I ended up going down quite a rabbit hole…."

Yes you did, and I very much enjoyed the way you laid it all out, although it was also a depressing read in the sense that I couldn't push aside the glaring fact that this stuff actually happened. This is one of the amazing things about the RPG hobby, how it prompts us to research various esoteric topics, learning about all sorts of things. There's really no other hobby quite like it. In any case, nice work!

Timothy's Comments on E&A #2:

John Redden – Reddened Stars

ICE agents raiding your farm sounds pretty daunting! But perhaps we get a biased view over here in the UK where they sound awful. Many thanks for the book recommendations. The Tim Alberta book sounds like something I should read. Cheers!

I love the idea of the geoengineering game, but did wonder about how it worked out for players whose characters don't have science skills? Or is it a set part of char gen for them?

Cosmos Nirvana? OK, I'll give it a go – it's on order. Should arrive Thursday.

Myles Corcoran – Twisting the Rope

You're not wrong about Jim and Conrad being dedicated! They have indeed written a lot of material! I'm in danger of them eclipsing the 366,000 words I wrote as a write up for my 40 session run of *The Traveller Adventure*! (That clocks in at something like 532 A4 pages – although I'd be the first to admit, they're not necessarily good pages, or words.)

Michael Cule – The Phoenix Nest

RYCTM – that did make me laugh! You're not wrong!

(I suppose the standard teaching I've received, which you may well know already, is that 'messages from God' should usually be tested against scripture first and foremost, prayerfully, and also with wise/experienced Christians amongst other things. Only once or twice in my life have I been absolutely sure I'm hearing 'directly', more usually it's through various readings/sermons/events/individuals piling up on each other rather blatantly.)

Mark Nemeth – The Seedling

RYCTM on my wife's retirement – thank you, she's enjoying it even if I'm not (more planning needed regarding working from home amongst other things) – but some interesting remarks that I think I should keep in mind – both now and when I eventually retire. So thanks for those.

AE7KL – Muxed & Mixed & Muffed

OK, I give up, I've had a google and can't find anything. What does "to xander" something mean? (Or, I suppose as you hint at a meaning, where on earth does it come from?!)

LAST WORD

Some escape humdrum lives to find a moment to role-play. Some role-play to escape humdrum lives.

---

14 https://pelgranepress.com/2012/02/01/eternal-lies-update/, and also see https://pelgranepress.com/tag/eternal-lies/